

EPIC 2023 PREVIEW!

JANUARY
2023

EMPIRE

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EXCLUSIVE**

THE LEGEND RETURNS!

FIRST INTERVIEWS.

FIRST IMAGES.

HARRISON FORD GEARS UP FOR
THE ULTIMATE ADVENTURE.

INDIANA JONES 5

PLUS!

**SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS
THE SPIDER-VERSE**

CREED III

JOHN WICK 4

**MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE
DEAD RECKONING**

AND MUCH, MUCH MORE!



**JAMES CAMERON
vs HOLLYWOOD**
THE AVATAR DIRECTOR
ANSWERS A-LISTERS'
QUESTIONS

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I OCCASIONALLY THINK back to an ancient relic that mesmerised me in my childhood. A black VHS case, which rested on a shelf near the family TV, it had on its front lurid art of a hissing snake, an ancient arch, a mystical box and, square in the centre, a grinning man brandishing a whip. It was pretty damn cool. And it turned out that the film inside — *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* — was even damn cooler. From the exotic start (hairy spiders!) to the wild finale (gloopy faces!), it was non-stop exciting, but also hilarious, warm and, well, magical. No movie I'd ever seen felt quite so *alive*.

Decades on, *Raiders* hasn't aged one bit. And while its star has, it hasn't slowed him down. We've all grown up with Harrison Ford as Indy, and he's still at it: while we've gone through four Bonds since *Raiders*, the fedora is still firmly atop Ford's head. So we're delighted to bring you the first-ever interviews with the icon himself, his co-stars Phoebe Waller-Bridge and Mads Mikkelsen and more, about the fifth and final *Indiana Jones* instalment. Turn to page 48 to find out what lies in store.

That's far from all. This issue is ludicrously stacked, with major exclusives on *Spider-Man: Across The Spider-Verse* (hopefully no hairy spiders there), *John Wick: Chapter 4*, *Ant-Man And The Wasp: Quantumania*, and many more. And in a ten-page extravaganza worthy of Great Mother Eywa, James Cameron takes time out from charting Pandora to answer questions from Hollywood's finest. It's a ridiculously great read, masterminded by our Features Editor Alex Godfrey, who now needs to have a very long lie-down. Possibly in an RDA cryosleep chamber.

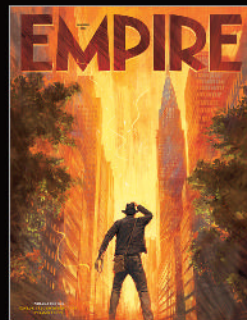
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Nick De Semlyen

NICK DE SEMLYEN
EDITOR
@nickdesemlyen

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by Sam Hadley

TURN TO PAGE 8 FOR DETAILS ON
HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Newsstand cover: © Disney. This page: Chris Proctor, Marco Vittur

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EMPIRE

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO THIS MONTH

HUNG OUT WITH CATE BLANCHETT



Empire's Olly Richards spoke to Cate Blanchett this month for *TÁR* — her performance is already being spoken of as an Oscar frontrunner. We also enlisted Mary McCartney to photograph her at Abbey Road Studios. See page 80.

CRACKED THE CASE WITH RIAN JOHNSON



Empire's Chris Hewitt spoke to writer-director Rian Johnson this month for *Glass Onion*, the latest Benoit Blanc whodunnit. If you, too, suspect foul play, listen to the interview in an upcoming episode of the *Empire* Podcast — and read our glowing review of the film on page 32.

HOSTED A LORD OF THE RINGS SPECIAL SCREENING



We hosted an epic finale episode screening of *The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power* and a Q&A with the showrunners and cast, plus a spoilerific chat with the Fellowship of the Pod. Sign up to hear it at empireonline.com/podcasts.

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Asa Butterfield! Milk! It was meant to be.

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The greatest sound in cinema — Indiana Jones punching the living crap out of Nazis — is back. In a world exclusive, we talk to Harrison Ford, James Mangold, Kathleen Kennedy and chums about how Professor Henry Jones Jr is still going strong all these decades on.

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Empire looks ahead to the coming year with the likes of Taika Waititi (*Next Goal Wins*), Michael B. Jordan (*Creed III*), Chad Stahelski (*John Wick: Chapter 4*), Christopher McQuarrie (that *Mission: Impossible* movie with the really long title) and more. It's going to be a belter. Cinematically speaking, that is. We make no promises for the actual year.

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Talking *TÁR* with the early frontrunner for the next Best Actress Oscar (which would be her third). We did a cracking shoot for this too. Well, we did have Cate Blanchett with the budget.

80 **JAMES CAMERON Q&A**

We asked Hollywood's finest to send us their burning questions for the *King Of The World*, James Cameron. They did not disappoint. And then James Cameron responded — in epic style.

Above: After 13 years of waiting, finally it's time to return to Pandora. Bring your wellies! Below: Samuel L. Jackson gets Ranked. Best not get it wrong.

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Disney, Landmark. Spine lines issue 408: Newsstand: "And why was 2022 a mistake?" is from *The Adam Project*. Subs: "Every year is the anniversary of a year" is from *The World's End*.

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THE WRITERS ARE NOT ON THE WALL

As a long-time subscriber, I am always disappointed that you never credit screenwriters above your reviews. As Robert Downey Jr said at the Oscars, when talking about filmmaking, "It's a collaboration between handsome, gifted people and sickly, little mole people." Come on, *Empire*, give the moles their credit!

HUGH JANES, PLYMOUTH

It's a fair point, Hugh. We have included screenwriting credits on our reviews in the past, and maybe we will do so again in the future. For the time being, where possible, our critics regularly make an effort to celebrate brilliant mole people in the reviews themselves. As Hitchcock once put it, "To make a great film you need three things: the script, the script, and the script."



ON THE FORTHCOMING VENOM 3: THE FIRST TWO WERE MOVIES. AND THIS THIRD ONE WILL BE SUCH A MOVIE TOO.

MARTYN WAKEFIELD

COMMENT OF THE MONTH

NOT TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL

I'm a secondary English teacher and I take my issues of *Empire* into school. My students love reading about the latest Netflix hit or Marvel movie. We have reading lessons once a week and they now ask every time if I have the latest edition — they even argue over who gets to look at it first. I can tell you as a teacher how rare but special this is. Thank you for continuing to fuel their passion for film and reading!

AAISHAH RAUF, VIA EMAIL

Aaishah, thank you for encouraging the next generation to love films — and our mag. Have a Picturehouse membership on us. And to your students: stay in school, kids! None of us at Empire ever skived off to watch films. No siree.



TOPHER GRACE HAS EDITED BOTH STAR WARS AND LOTR INTO ROUGHLY 3 HOUR-LONG SUPERCUTS/ONE WHOLE FILM. IT'S ONE OF THE MANY USELESS FACTS I'VE LEARNT FROM YEARS OF LISTENING TO THE @EMPIREMAGAZINE PODCAST

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THE MASK SLIPS

Is it me or are the photos you show of directors on set but hidden behind a face mask really annoying? We get it. You're being safe. For publicity's sake, couldn't they just take their masks off for a few seconds?

GRANT HADLAND, VIA EMAIL

As much as we would also like to see the lovely filmmaker faces more often, the boring-but-like reason that the directors stay masked is for insurance. In the post-Covid world, precautions have to be taken to avoid an expensive production shutdown. That, or it's something to do with Bill Gates and 5G towers.

We're not sure.

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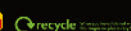
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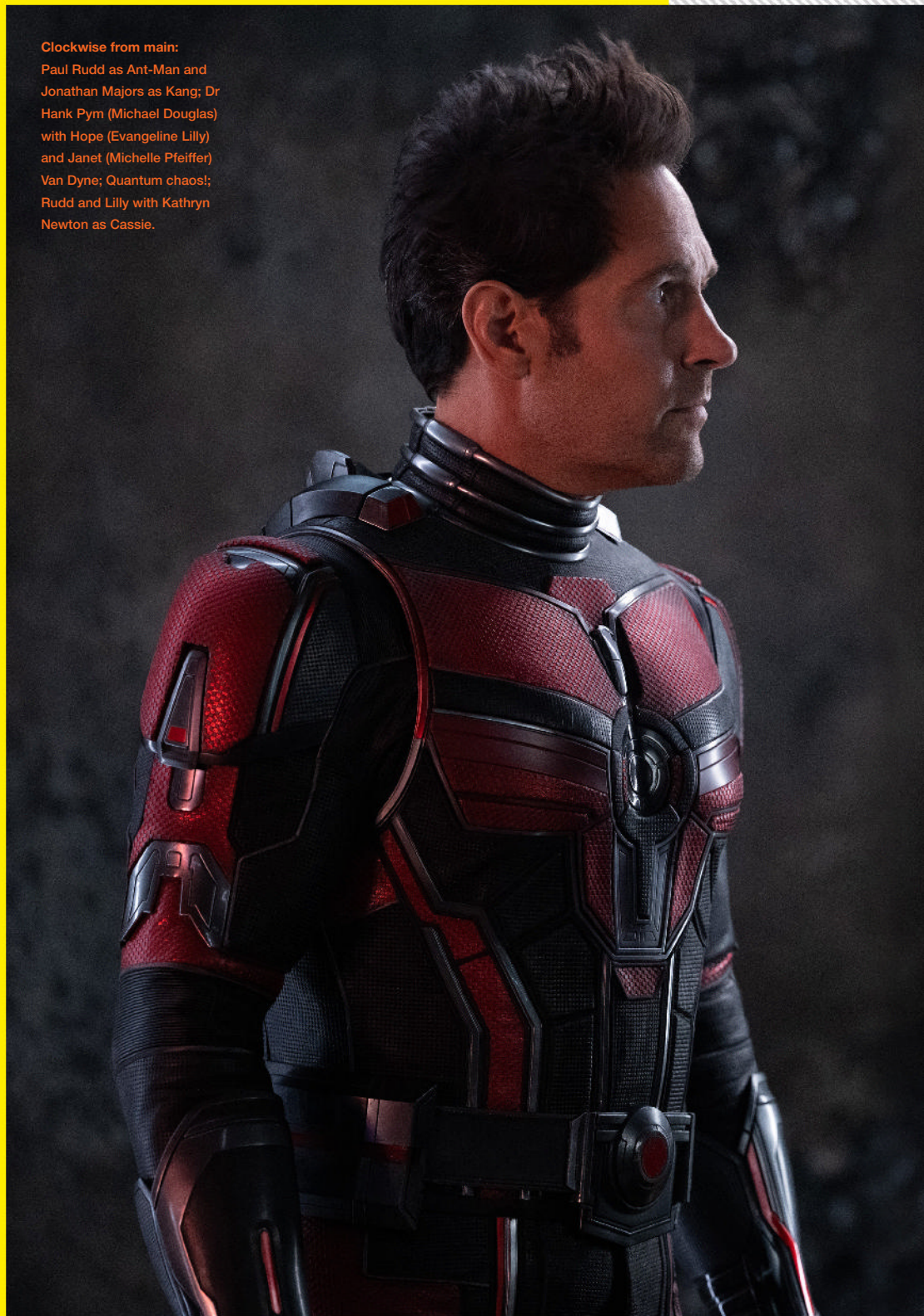
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TAKE 2

THIS MONTH'S FILM MOMENTS THAT MATTER

[EDITED BY BETH WEBB]

Clockwise from main:
Paul Rudd as Ant-Man and
Jonathan Majors as Kang; Dr
Hank Pym (Michael Douglas)
with Hope (Evangeline Lilly)
and Janet (Michelle Pfeiffer)
Van Dyne; Quantum chaos!
Rudd and Lilly with Kathryn
Newton as Cassie.





SOME SUPERHEROES HAVE legendary foes. Spider-Man, Batman and the X-Men, say, have no shortage of nefarious ne'er-do-wells to pit their wits against. And then, on the other side of the coin, is Ant-Man. Marvel's mightiest mini-Avenger may have been around since the '60s, but even seasoned comic-book fans might struggle to name more than two classic Ant-Man villains. There's the guy with the yellow jacket (whose name, helpfully, is Yellowjacket) and... no, it's gone.

This is something of which Peyton Reed was aware when he sat down to figure out *Ant-Man And The Wasp: Quantumania*, the third MCU movie to follow Paul Rudd's tiny titan. "It felt like I wanted to pit Ant-Man against an all-timer antagonist," he tells *Empire*. And they don't come much more all-timey than Kang The Conqueror.

A time-travelling despot with designs on manipulating the Multiverse in order to rule it all, Kang is the MCU's next Big Bad, a character so important that his name even forms part of the title of the next Avengers movie, *The Kang Dynasty* (an honour that was never afforded Thanos; suck that, you purple prat). As played by Jonathan Majors, he was introduced, after a fashion, in the final episode of the first season of *Loki*, as a character called He Who Remains, whose death triggered the creation of the Multiverse and set the stage for mega-mayhem, with limitless Kang variants popping up. "Kang The Conqueror in our movie is a very different character," says Reed. "He's someone who has dominion over time, and he's a warrior and a strategist." The dynamic between the duelling characters intrigued the director. "That's interesting to me: to take the tiniest, and in some people's minds weakest, Avenger, and put them up against this absolute force of nature." Kang The Conqueror, meet Lang The Conquerable.

Although, when *Quantumania* begins, Kang — force of nature or not — finds himself trapped in the Quantum Realm, the sub-atomic universe that exists beneath ours. And, in a departure from the first two *Ant-Man* movies, that's where Scott and the Ant-Gang (Evangeline Lilly's Hope Van Dyne, Michael Douglas' Hank Pym, Michelle Pfeiffer's Janet Van Dyne, and Kathryn Newton as Scott's daughter Cassie) find themselves after an experiment gone wrong. "We wanted to explore the Quantum Realm," Reed says. Both *Ant-Man* movies prior to this spent a small amount of time in there — and things got pretty trippy. Reed plans to up the ante in that regard. "It's a massive, massive world-building undertaking," he explains. "It owes in equal part to electron microscope photography, '70s and '80s *Heavy Metal* magazine stuff, a lot of my favourite science-fiction-book cover artists, and there's a little Mobius in there. Fantastical realism is the vibe."

It promises to be a feast for the eyes. That is, if you can tear them away from Kang, Marvel's next major menace. "I think it has a profound impact on the MCU," says Reed of the character's arrival. "Jeff Loveness, who wrote this movie, is writing *The Kang Dynasty* as well, so there's been a lot of discussion about the impact that this appearance of Kang The Conqueror makes. There are big things in store." Sounds like we're going to get a lot of Kang for our buck. **CHRIS HEWITT**

ANT-MAN AND THE WASP: QUANTUMANIA IS IN CINEMAS

FROM 17 FEBRUARY 2023





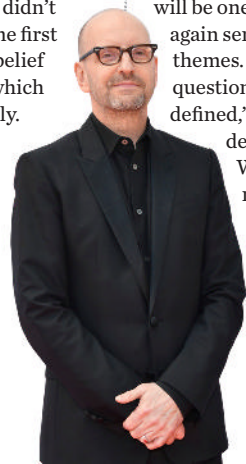
Magic Mike's curtain call

STEVEN SODERBERGH on directing his stripper swan song

IF STEVEN SODERBERGH hadn't been replaced as the director of *Moneyball*, *Magic Mike* may never have come to be. Instead of helming the Brad Pitt-fronted sports movie (eventually directed by Bennett Miller), the filmmaker moved onto *Haywire* and, while speaking to star Channing Tatum, saw instant opportunity in a throwaway comment. "It's crazy," Soderbergh tells *Empire*. "Just one sentence. He said to me, 'Oh yeah, I'm working on this idea of when I was a stripper in Tampa when I was 19.'"

Two films, a stage production and a reality-TV show later, the pair are embarking on the final chapter in the *Magic Mike* franchise: *Magic Mike's Last Dance*. It's been a journey that's taken up over a decade of their lives, and that began with an important lesson for the pair: they didn't need anyone but themselves. "With the first film, Channing and I had the mutual belief that we could pull this off ourselves, which is what we did," says Soderbergh fondly.

The *Magic Mike* films have always been about more than the athletic, choreographed removal of clothing for cash. The 2012 film took aim at the economic climate in America, while *Magic Mike XXL* was a road movie that focused on both camaraderie and female desire.



"Channing and the group have used dance as this Trojan horse to talk about other ideas," says Soderbergh. "I think that's part of the appeal, in addition to the pure fun of watching these incredibly talented dancers perform."

But, like Ginuwine in his R&B track 'Pony', Mike was always just a bachelor looking for a partner. In *Magic Mike's Last Dance* he finally gets his wish, in the form of Salma Hayek's Max, who we find at a crossroads in her life. The relationship takes him to London, where Hayek's character is hellbent on hosting an all-guns-blazing dance performance at a prestigious music hall that she's come to own. "We wanted to blow the dancing up in a big way," says Soderbergh, who confirms that the final 30 minutes of the film will be one giant dance sequence. The dancing again serves as a Trojan horse for brand-new themes. "I think today, there are real questions around just how relationships are defined," Soderbergh reflects. "What does desire mean? What does love mean? What is commitment? That's what the movie is trying to get into."

The film wastes little time in trying to answer these questions, setting the tone early on with a dance sequence between Tatum and Hayek which cranks up the heat



Clockwise from main: Dirty dancing — Channing Tatum and Salma Hayek; Checking out Mike's magical six-pack; Director Steven Soderbergh.

and establishes what's to come for the rest of the story. "They still have their clothes on," says Soderbergh. "But it's not typical, especially for an American film, to go into this kind of sensuality and eroticism without being explicit."

This will, Soderbergh confirms, be the final time Tatum's Mike flaunts his moves. For the filmmaker, it's been a singular collaboration. "My whole thing was, 'You and I are going to pay for this, and then we're gonna sell it.' All these other opportunities flowed from that initial belief in ourselves," he says. "The idea that you can go off and do things without asking for anybody's permission — that makes me happy." As serendipitous stripper sagas go, *Magic Mike* couldn't have had a happier ending. **BETH WEBB**

MAGIC MIKE'S LAST DANCE IS IN CINEMAS FROM
10 FEBRUARY 2023

No./3 NEXT IN THE SERIES

You fell in love with that incredible new TV show. And then it ended! Don't despair — **Boyd Hilton** recommends the sibling shows to watch next

IF YOU LOVED... THE ENGLISH



THE SHADOW LINE

BRITBOX

Years before he created *The English*, writer/producer/director Hugo Blick made a string of

ambitious dramas for the BBC, starting with this expert conspiracy thriller in 2011. *The Shadow Line* also features vivid roles for Stephen Rea and Rafe Spall, who both went on to star in *The English*. Spall plays Jay Wratten, the psychotic nephew of a drug baron; Rea is the enigmatic, soft-spoken villain-in-chief, Gatehouse. They're both embroiled in a high-level police investigation led by Chiwetel Ejiofor's troubled Inspector Gabriel, which plays out in enthralling, operatic style. A TV drama classic.



EMPIRE

PRIME VIDEO

The English is a rare foray into TV drama for Emily Blunt since this 2005 American network

TV take on ancient Rome, not to be confused with the music-biz drama of the same name, nor, indeed, this magazine. This six-part series is narrated by Camane (Blunt), a vestal virgin who has visions of the future which are not good news for Julius Caesar (Colm Feore). Clearly influenced by the movie *Gladiator*, the production was overshadowed by HBO's bigger-budget *Rome*, but Blunt is the impressively naturalistic standout.



DEADWOOD

PARAMOUNT+

If *The English* has whetted your appetite for richly detailed TV Westerns, it's well worth

going back to this ultimate example of the genre. *Deadwood* ran for three memorable seasons from 2004 to 2006, plus the one-off movie in

2016, tracing the violent history of the Dakota territory in the 1870s. With Timothy Oliphant and Ian McShane playing real-life historical figures, and fabulous roles for Kim Dickens, Molly Parker and Anna Gunn, the show establishes a magnificently authentic yet wildly entertaining world of chaotic lawlessness, full of debauchery, profanity and blood-letting.



BANSHEE

SKY ON DEMAND/NOW

The English provided a life-changing role for Chaske Spencer, who up until now was most

famous for the *Twilight* films. But he also starred in Seasons 3 and 4 of the ultra-violent *Banshee*, playing Deputy Billy Raven — regarded as an outcast by his community, having moved on from the corrupt law-enforcement operation in his reservation to work under Antony Starr's sheriff in Pennsylvania. Watching Spencer grappling with local neo-Nazis is a total blast.

THE ENGLISH IS ON BBC iPLAYER NOW

No./4 THE SECRETS OF JENNY THE DONKEY

She stole the show in *The Banshees Of Inisherin*. Now, her handler Rita Maloney reveals four facts about the braying breakout



HER MOTIVATION WAS CARROTS

"She hadn't read the script, because Jenny isn't great at reading.

They'd use her favourite food, carrots, to make her do what Martin [McDonagh, director] needed her to do for the scene. But ultimately, if the donkey didn't want to do it, Martin had to work around it."



SHE GOT ROWDY WITH COLIN FARRELL

"Yes, Jenny did kick him. They were shooting a scene where Colin is feeding Jenny and Minnie the pony together. Jenny had never had to share anything before and got a little agitated. Colin, in fairness, took the kick like a man."



SHE'S ALREADY RETIRED

"Martin didn't want her to be commercialised after the film. He wanted to protect her from [the spotlight]. So she's now retired, in a field in another county, running around with other donkeys. I saw her the other day. She's the smallest one there but still has that diva attitude."



AWARDS DON'T INTEREST HER

"Would Jenny come out of retirement to attend the Oscars? Not in a month of Sundays! She'd prefer Colin wins something. I've been working with him since he was a wee nipper, and they had chemistry like I've never seen. Even if she did kick him that one time."

AL HORNER



Making White Noise's supermarket showstopper

Greta Gerwig and choreographer David Neumann unpack the new drama's surprising dance number

"IT WASN'T LIKE *Apocalypse Now*, but there were some challenges to making that film," reflects *White Noise*'s choreographer David Neumann. And nothing was more daunting than the huge, supermarket-set dance scene that plays out at the end of Noah Baumbach's film, featuring Greta Gerwig, Adam Driver and many more.

Here, Neumann and Gerwig reveal to *Empire* how this adaptation of Don DeLillo's satirical novel ended up culminating in a grocery-store boogie.

THE COLLABORATION

Gerwig — a skilled dancer — discovered Neumann's choreography when she was an 18-year-old student in New York, catching a performance of his work. "I remember seeing this mix of dance and theatre and thinking, 'That's exactly what I want to do,'" she says. The actor followed his career for years, before introducing him to Baumbach, her partner.

The filmmaker had Neumann work on a few scenes in *Marriage Story*, his last feature. Yet with *White Noise* the choreographer was



Top to bottom: The Gladney clan, dancing in the aisles; Vegging out; André Benjamin boxes clever; Check out their moves!

working on a whole other scale, manifesting Baumbach's idea of a celebratory closing set-piece involving the Gladney family (fronted by Gerwig and Driver), the surrounding cast and around 100 extras. "We had to do a dance of shopping," Neumann laughs. "This quasi-1980s American [dance] in the supermarket."

THE INSPIRATION

As a starting point, Neumann took field trips. "I'm not really taking in the supermarket the way that Don DeLillo takes in the supermarket," he says. "I tried to take more of the writer's eye and ear and sense of observation." Then he started playing with the products — vegetables, cereal — to help inform his dancers' movements. "He'd send these videos where [he'd pretend] cereal boxes were stuck to his hand, but he'd be moving," says Gerwig. Neumann also studied movies from the '80s to get a sense of how a dance sequence would be visually presented during that era.

THE MOVES

The cast, which also includes Don Cheadle, Jodie Turner-Smith and André Benjamin, were given some leeway for improvisation. "Adam would ask, 'Should I do this? Is it okay to grab my wallet?' He always brought terrific ideas to what he was doing.

He was really trying to root it in his character," Neumann recalls. Meanwhile, Benjamin — who plays a professor — created a particularly memorable solo routine with a box of cookies. ("That little shimmy," Gerwig laughs, shaking her shoulders and mimicking the move.)

THE SHOOT

Filming took around a day-and-a-half during a humid summer in Cleveland. It was choreographed to a stand-in track by LCD Soundsystem while the band polished off their first original music in four years for the final film. Some challenges rose above the rest, including a moment involving a perfectly timed cantaloupe toss. "It seems ridiculous that I'm saying it now, but it was terribly important at the time," says Neumann.

Gerwig is ecstatic with the results. "It's unbelievably beautiful; the shopping carts, people laying on vegetables," she enthuses. "I can't imagine anything more pleasurable than people of all different ages, [with] all different bodies, dancing." "Clean-up on aisle five" has never been quite so joyful. **BETH WEBB**

WHITE NOISE IS ON NETFLIX FROM 30 DECEMBER



Season's Greetings!

The Guardians Of The Galaxy Holiday Special brings a festive finale to the MCU's fourth phase

GIANT INFLATABLE SANTAS! Drax in a novelty jumper! Kevin Bacon?! James Gunn's 40-minute festive caper, *The Guardians Of The Galaxy Holiday Special*, promises everything but a space-partridge in an intergalactic pear tree, with Chris Pratt's Star-Lord and his motley crew storming Earth — and Hollywood — in a pre-*Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 3* warm-up story. The relentlessly busy Gunn serves as writer-director on the short film, which sees the gang on an Earthbound mission to lift Star-Lord's spirits after Gamora's (Zoe Saldana) heart-wrenching demise at the hands of her evil dad Thanos.

Gunn, a self-confessed fan of the ill-fated 1978 *Star Wars Holiday Special*, said that he "bugged Kevin Feige endlessly" over the years about giving the Guardians their own televised merry mission, before Feige buckled and announced the project back in 2020. And while this *Holiday Special* doesn't feature child Wookiees, trippy animated segments (that we know of) or Harrison Ford in visible discomfort, it does have the aforementioned Bacon, whom the Guardians deem the perfect gift for their mourning pal. That Bacon seems



less than co-operative with their mission is but a minor blip. And where the *Star Wars Holiday Special* hailed the arrival of one Boba Fett (via said trippy animated sequence, in which the iconic bounty hunter rode a giant pink alien steed), here we get Maria Bakalova's debut as the voice of Cosmo The Spacedog, a four-pawed accomplice who until now held merely Easter-egg status. A furry good time appears to be on the cards for all.

Of course, this isn't the first time the Guardians have blasted onto our screens this year. While Groot got his own mini origin series on Disney+, the gang also briefly adopted Thor for some intergalactic ass-whooping adventures in *Love And Thunder*. Gunn describes his *Holiday Special* as "the epilogue of Phase Four": a continuation of the events of *Love And Thunder*, with a story he says will gear up the Guardians for their final solo outing.

That we get plenty of tinsel, twinkly lights and an A-list kidnapping to boot only adds to the festive fun. Drax the hells with boughs of holly, indeed.

BETH WEBB

THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY HOLIDAY SPECIAL IS ON DISNEY+ FROM 25 NOVEMBER

Top: Drax (Dave Bautista) the Destroyer... of fashion. Above: Chris Pratt as Star-Lord, in need of a bit of festive cheer.

No. 7 Move over, Chucky

There's a new ultra-creepy doll ready to wreak havoc. **M3GAN** producer James Wan and writer Akela Cooper introduce us...

1

THE INSPIRATION

As with any respectable horror movie, the genesis for *M3GAN* lies in a deep-seated childhood fear. "My thing was ventriloquist dummies," laughs the film's writer, Akela Cooper. "I saw the Anthony Hopkins movie *Magic* at a really young age and that cemented the creepiness in my brain. I was a big *Child's Play* fan, too. It was always my dream to create an iconic monster of my own." So, when producer James Wan, with whom Cooper had worked on 2021 horror *Malignant*, approached her to pen a new spin on the 'killer-doll' genre, her reaction was instant: "Hell, yeah, I'll take a crack!"

2

THE FACE

For James Wan, who also produced 2014 spooky-doll outing *Annabelle*, tapping into *M3GAN*'s sinister yet vacant expression was simple. "It's *Annabelle* meets *The Terminator*," he laughs. Short for 'Model 3 Generative Android', *M3GAN* is an AI doll with a distinctly human face, designed by roboticist Gemma (Allison Williams) to be "a parent's greatest ally and a child's greatest friend".

When Gemma's orphaned niece Cady (Violet McGraw) moves in, the robo-BFF is called upon to provide companionship. "That soon goes off the rails," Wan confirms. "I'm fascinated by things that are meant to be innocent, but become more... malign."

3

THE CLOTHES

Cooper had imagined "pigtails and kid-like clothing", so she was delighted when *M3GAN*'s design team conjured up the yassified Victorian chambermaid you see here. "Seeing the reaction to the trailer, and knowing there were probably people putting together *M3GAN* Halloween costumes, gave me immense joy," she says. In fact, at least one person did recreate the look for Halloween: horror maestro Jason Blum, who produces the film, and who posted a photo of himself in a replica costume on 28 October, with the caption, "I'm kind of like a #M3GAN 2.0. (40 years later)".

4

THE LEGS

"Came for the horror, stayed for the dance." So reads the top-rated YouTube comment beneath the *M3GAN* trailer. When Cady teaches *M3GAN* how to dance, Wan explains, "that ends up infusing her 'personality'. But since she's more than just a toy, she becomes capable of things we as humans can't even do." The exact whys and what-the-hells of the dance scene are under wraps, but Cooper does add that she's "looking forward to people hearing the song choice". (Clue: it's not the creepy Taylor Swift remix featured in the trailer.)

TOM ELLEN

M3GAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 13 JANUARY 2023

No./8 Serving up a second course of Boiling Point

Inside the serialised sequel to the Stephen Graham-fronted restaurant stress-fest

SPARE A THOUGHT for any diners at London's Jones & Sons restaurant who haven't seen *Boiling Point*. "People keep going in and taking pictures of themselves lying in the spot where [Andy, played by Stephen Graham] collapses at the end," says Philip Barantini, director of the tense one-take kitchen drama, which was shot in the restaurant in March 2020. The filmmaker concedes that that must be a pretty perplexing sight for anyone not acquainted with the film. Then again, there's much that's perplexing right



now regarding *Boiling Point* — not least the news that it's been commissioned as a TV series, featuring the character many presumed died at the film's end.

"Well, we wrote it as a heart attack. In our minds, he lived," grins Barantini. "It was definitely left open to interpretation. So when the BBC approached us about doing a TV show and we spoke to Stephen, it felt like the right thing to do." The *This Is England* actor is a supporting character this time rather than the show's lead. "Stephen's incredibly busy so wasn't able to do the full series," Barantini reveals. Instead, the show — which is currently in production — picks up six months after the film, and

focuses on Carly, Andy's sous chef from the movie, played by *The Lazarus Project*'s Vinette Robinson. However, each episode also "goes on a journey with a different character from



Above: Sous chef Carly (Vinette Robinson) will return as the *Boiling Point* TV show's main focus. **Below:** Stephen Graham as Andy, who it turns out *isn't* toast.

the kitchen, diving into their little pocket of life", exploring what they get up to without their aprons, too.

There is another major departure in store. "We made the decision early on that we wouldn't film it in one take," says Barantini. "It wasn't sustainable for the story we wanted to tell. And for the viewer, five hour-long episodes of that is just too intense." Elsewhere, however, *Boiling Point* the series promises to continue faithfully from the film. "It's still very stressful. It's still shot in a socially realistic way. And the customers and pressures can still be a nightmare," Barantini confirms. "When you work in hospitality you really are a sitting duck, never knowing who is going to walk through the door. So the possibilities are endless in terms of stories to explore." In other words, it's a familiar-but-different dish Barantini is cooking up — with tension emphatically still on the menu. **AL HORNER**

BOILING POINT WILL BE ON BBC TV AND BBC iPLAYER IN 2023

No./9 DC UNDER THE GUNN

With James Gunn anointed co-head of DC Studios alongside Peter Safran, what can we expect from this new era?

MAN OF STEEL 2

That *Black Adam* appearance made it official: Henry Cavill hasn't hung up the cape. It was, he said on Instagram, "a very small taste of things to come." Given Gunn's come close to Superman before (he went for *The Suicide Squad* instead), he may even direct it himself. The series could do with a Gunn-shot of irreverence.

PEACEMAKER: SEASON 2

Gunn's already committed to delivering more toilet-seat-helmeted carnage, and confirmed it would start filming once he was done with *Guardians Vol. 3*. Expect Robert Patrick to return as Peacemaker's racist dad in ghost-form (spoiler alert), and hope for a guest appearance by Bat-Mite.

HARLEY QUINN 2

In his joint statement with Safran, Gunn included Harley among characters they were committed to, alongside Superman, Batman, Aquaman and Wonder Woman. She's an anti-hero Gunn dearly loves, and he had a blast working with Margot Robbie on *The Suicide Squad*, so her return is virtually guaranteed.

DEADMAN

In a "Happy Halloween" tweet, Gunn posted an image of DC weirdo-hero Deadman, a murdered circus acrobat who comes back as a ghost, able to possess people in his search for justice. It might just have been a tweet. Or it might have been a huge clue to a forthcoming announcement...

DAN JOLIN



No./10

"At 45 I'm still there, on my little canoe going down the river"

[THE Q&A] **SAMANTHA MORTON** on honouring the women in #MeToo drama *She Said*, and her fearless approach to performing

SAMANTHA MORTON HAS never been one to play things safe. In a career spanning over 30 years, she's taken to challenging roles like a precog to water, whether she's sporting a zombie skin disguise as nefarious Alpha in *The Walking Dead* or playing an actual precog alongside Tom Cruise in high-concept sci-fi *Minority Report*. Her next role is Zelda Perkins, a key voice in bringing down Harvey Weinstein, in true-life drama *She Said*. She tells *Empire* what's driving her at this stage in her career.

You play Zelda Perkins, Harvey Weinstein's former assistant in *She Said*. Why were you compelled to take the role?

Harvey just didn't like me, from the very off. He offered me a movie and I said no because I didn't like the character, so he would then do things to harm my career. But I didn't just have that with Harvey; I've had that with a lot of significant male producers in the industry. I was bullied by Harvey, so I have all this history in regards to being a young actress in the '90s. When I was offered the part in *She Said*, I felt very protective of Zelda [Perkins, Weinstein's former personal assistant]. I wanted to make sure that it was done the right way, in a way that was respectful.

You also have *The Whale* coming up, in which you play Brendan Fraser's character's ex-wife. How was the shoot? I hadn't seen the play [the film is based upon], which was good for me because it meant that I was making the part my own. I was based in the UK, so Darren Aronofsky and the team were very supportive of me reading on Zoom. It made



Top to bottom:
Woman on top:
Samantha
Morton; As
Zelda Perkins
in *She Said*.

me feel part of something, so that when I arrived I was part of the fabric of the film as opposed to just someone popping in to be there for a couple of weeks. Just watching Brendan every day, gosh, in those scenes and with what he was carrying on his body; it just

colleagues; I was never really somebody that got starstruck. I just don't get that thing of fear because I'm so excited to meet people.

You were one of *The Walking Dead*'s major villains for two seasons. How are you feeling now the original show has just come to an end?

I was offered *The Walking Dead* at a time when I'd done a few films by really brilliant filmmakers that did really well on the festival circuit but didn't have any huge distributors behind them. And it made me quite sad, so I was like, 'Maybe I should go back to television.' When I was offered the role of Alpha I did a bit of research and saw that it was shot on film; there were three cameras on at all times. [It was shot in], like, a mini studio. I was so excited to play that role. I just want the meaty, juicy roles where I can flex those acting muscles and do something that I've never done before.

How did you feel about Alpha's fanbase?

I loved that she was so popular. And they brought her back for a little spin-off [*The Tales Of The Walking Dead*] which was great.

Was your hunger for meaty roles what drew you to playing Catherine de' Medici in *The Serpent Queen*?

It was a no-brainer. You've got film people making television and they're doing it correctly and making it in the way that I like. It's like, "Let's get the scripts right rather than making content." I just feel really lucky right now because at 45 I'm still there, on my little canoe going down the river.

CAITLIN QUINLAN

SHE SAID IS IN CINEMAS FROM

25 NOVEMBER



Clockwise from left: Jessica Gao (second from left) and her onscreen iteration Eden Lee (second from right); A robot called K.E.V.I.N.; Tatiana Maslany as She-Hulk.



No. 11 Inside Marvel's most meta moment yet

She-Hulk's creator Jessica Gao on that boundary-smashing finale

"THERE WAS A moment when Kevin [Feige] was going to be played by a puppy," laughs Jessica Gao, head writer on *She-Hulk: Attorney-At-Law*, reflecting on the most gloriously bonkers TV finale of the year. In the show's Season 1 climax, the titular hero didn't just break the fourth wall — she Hulk-smashed it to smithereens, stopping the episode midway through to storm into Marvel HQ and confront its head honcho. "We also talked about George Clooney or Jon Hamm playing Kevin," says Gao, "but in the end, this felt right" — "this" being a robot, with whom Jennifer Walters chats about the nature of MCU storytelling. Obviously.

How did this ending come about? "While writing the final episode, I had this sense that

I needed to deliver a classic Marvel ending — a big bad, a conspiracy and a big fight that we'd blow all our budget on," Gao recalls. "But it wasn't working." Enter Kevin Feige with some helpful advice. "He told me, 'From the beginning this show has been completely different. Why stop now?' After that, I realised it didn't need to end in that conventional Marvel way."

Liberated, Gao took existing fan debates about Marvel's formula for concluding stories and wove them into the story — a meta approach with roots in John Byrne's *Sensational She-Hulk* comic run. "In

that, she's aware she's in a comic book and has opinions about what's happening to her. It felt so true to who this character is so I thought, 'How far can I push that here?'"

Sending Walters smashing through the Disney+ menu screen was Feige's idea. "He wanted viewers to think for a second that they'd sat on the remote," grins Gao. The writer says she hopes the finale "allows more Marvel projects to get a little weird." More sexual, too. "Oh, I loved that line," she laughs when asked about Walters' remark in the episode about the joys of a different type of Hulk-smashing. "One of my proudest accomplishments is how this was the horniest Marvel show so far," she laughs. The bar for both horniness and inventive Marvel TV endings has been raised. *Loki* Season 2, over to you... **AL HORNER**



SHE-HULK: ATTORNEY-AT-LAW IS ON DISNEY+ NOW

[TREND REPORT]

No. 12 BONY HEADGEAR

Wearing skeletal remains on your bonce is the new big-screen fashion statement

WORDS **BETH WEBB**
ILLUSTRATIONS **BILL MCCONKEY**



THE PREDATOR PREY

The thrilling prequel welcomed back the Predator like an old friend, albeit one with a terrifying headpiece that accentuates their fanged alien mouth.

This impenetrable helmet proves a challenge for Amber Midthunder's Naru.



THE ORCS THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER

With Sauron's hordes getting a headgear upgrade, this variety of bony bonnets, one with a sharp fin, one with some impressive rivets, quickly became Middle-earth's must-have accessory.



ATTUMA BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER

If your brawny deep-sea villain isn't wearing a hammerhead-shark-inspired helmet, is he even a deep-sea Atlantean villain? Namor's ally Attuma is this big blue sea army's MVP. **BETH WEBB**

No./13

The secrets of the Overlook

A huge new book on **THE SHINING** features rare and unseen photos. Like these...

LEE UNKRICH — DIRECTOR of *Toy Story 3* and *Coco* — saw Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* at the impressionable and perhaps unhealthy age of 12. He became immediately obsessed, searching for *Shining* screenplay drafts, reading about deleted scenes and hunting down rare photos, ultimately making it his lifelong passion, resulting in Easter eggs in the films he worked on for Pixar (Sid's carpet in the original *Toy Story* might look familiar). And for the past ten years he has worked on an exhaustive three-volume Taschen book about the haunted-hotel horror film: *Stanley Kubrick's The Shining*, comprising new interviews and countless photographs. Not a moment of the production has been, well, overlooked. We asked him to tell us the stories behind some special shots.



3. KIDDING ABOUT

Little Danny Torrance (Dan Lloyd) has visions of dead twin sisters (Lisa and Louise Burns). It's a jolt, then, to see the three of them having fun on set. "The girls have only existed, at least as children, as those characters in those dresses. So it is strange to see them a) smiling and b) in their street clothes palling around with Danny, who's terrified of them in the film. Someone had been taking photos one day, and they ended up making prints and gave some to the Burns family. So when I spoke with Lisa and Louise and their lovely mother, Esme, who chaperoned them on the set, they explained how the images came to be, and shared them with me."



4. DEAD DOOR

Jack Torrance, grinning maniacally through the door he's obliterating, is one of the most iconic shots in horror history. This, from the other side, was the aftermath.

"I love this because it feels like an art photograph. It's something I could see blown up large, hanging on a wall. It's actually from a trim from the end of one of the shots in the film — it's in the aftermath of him chopping. He hears Hallorann's [Scatman Crothers] snowcat arriving and then he ends up leaving that shot. That's why he doesn't kill Wendy in that moment. This image is a frame not used in the film, after Jack had left. A tail-end of a shot before they cut the camera. It's a striking image."



1. FROZEN IN TIME

The penultimate shot of *The Shining* features a frozen Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson), dead in a maze. Here he is, propped up, with only his axe for company.

"They needed Jack to stay stock-still. That's why you see all that bracing behind him, and Styrofoam, to hold his head still. In the finished film it's a locked shot of him, a close-up. But it started as a much wider shot — there was a trademark Kubrick slow zoom-in on Jack's face. So he had to stay still much longer than even what you see in the film. When I watch the film now, there's the last little bit of a residual zoom in the first few frames of the shot, that nobody would ever notice."

2. KUBRICK THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Among the many unseen photographs Unkrich unearthed were some — including this one of Shelley Duvall — taken by Kubrick himself...

"When I was scanning images [from the production], I noticed that two rolls were labelled 'SK', and I finally realised Stanley had shot those images. Once I realised, it was very clear just looking at them that he had. He was a photojournalist for years in his youth and shot many really striking images. And when I looked through the images that Stanley had shot on the film, every one was striking. The [Kubrick] Archive didn't even know that Kubrick had taken some of those photos. So that was a nice discovery to have made."



5. ALL WORK BUT SOME PLAY

Nicholson was completely comfortable in Kubrick's hands. As is noted in Unkrich's book, the actor didn't even watch the dailies — as long as Kubrick was happy with the footage, so was he. "This is when they were shooting the scene where Jack is wandering around the hotel with writer's block and throwing his ball around. It's a nice moment of Jack giving his trademark grin to Murray Close, the photographer. There was a lot of levity on that set, a lot of joking around. I heard a lot about the relationship between Stanley and Jack. It was a very playful relationship, a meeting of minds: Jack was a very charismatic, social person and Stanley was more private, more subdued. So it's interesting to see the two of them together, trying to find this kind of equilibrium between each other." **ALEX GODFREY**

STANLEY KUBRICK'S *THE SHINING* IS PUBLISHED

BY TASCHEN ON 14 DECEMBER

Pickaxe in snow: TM & © WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC. (s22) Courtesy of Matthew D. Dalton. Shelley Duvall in dressing gown:

TM & © WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC. (s22). Courtesy of the Stanley Kubrick Archive. Trio of kids: TM & © WARNER BROS.

ENTERTAINMENT INC. (s22). Courtesy of Lisa and Louise Burns. Bathroom: TM & © WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT INC. (s22). Courtesy of the Stanley Kubrick Archive

No./14

The Father, The Son, and the returning director

FLORIAN ZELLER on the emotionally charged follow-up to his Oscar-winning drama

"YES, I AM. I'm tired," says Florian Zeller. How could he not be? *The Father*, 2020's heart-shattering drama about dementia, saw Zeller serenading 2021's awards circuit for quite some time, with the film receiving six Oscar nominations, winning two. All the while, though, he was prepping his follow-up, and here it is already. "It's my way to be alive, to work and to dream, to have a big part of my life taken by work," he explains. "That's how I breathe."

Like *The Father*, *The Son* is another adaptation of one of Zeller's own plays, but despite the title, there is no connection between the characters, even though Anthony Hopkins appears in both. *The Son* focuses chiefly on Hugh Jackman's Peter, attempting to juggle a high-powered job, a relationship with his new partner Beth (Vanessa Kirby), his ex-wife Kate (Laura Dern) and his teenage son Nicholas (Zen McGrath), who is skipping school, heavily depressed and self-harming.

Structurally, it's a traditional, linear story — unlike *The Father*'s experiential dementia puzzle. "Every story tells you how it should be told," explains Zeller. "For *The Father*, it was about trying to put the audience in the main character's brain. Here, I made the decision to try to do something as simple as possible in terms of narrative. Most of my plays look like mazes, or labyrinths, so it was like anathema for me to be that straightforward. But it was a way to mirror my approach, which was to not shy away from this subject, and to face this painful situation."



Top to bottom: Hugh Jackman, as Peter in happier times with his son Nicholas (George Cobell); Florian Zeller with Jackman; Peter with ex-wife Kate (Laura Dern) and the teen Nicholas (Zen McGrath).





No./15

Star Wars drops a club banger

Among the surprises in **Andor**: an electronic tune that got our hands in the air. We find out how it happened

It is painful. As Jackman's Peter attempts to understand and help his son, he finds his efforts coming undone in the face of Nicholas' spiralling depression. Zeller did mull over the prospect of telling the story from Nicholas' point of view, more akin to *The Father*: "It would have been almost easier for me to do that. To make the audience experience what it could be like to have that reality." But in focusing on the father's perspective, the film does, to some extent, allow us to walk in Peter's shoes. Zeller wanted to give a sense of "the people around the one who is suffering. The people who are trying to open doors, but have no keys. I wanted the audience to be in that position, with all the frustration that goes with it."

The film's title is something of a red herring: Jackman's Peter is the real son of the story, says Zeller, which comes to light in the brutal scene the actor shares with Hopkins, as his heartless father. "We understand that he's also a son in pain," says Zeller of Peter. "There is the circle of trauma between generations." Ultimately, it is a film about best intentions flailing in the face of something unfathomable. "I used mental illness to explore this position where, as a parent, you do not know what to do anymore," Zeller explains. "I think part of the journey of being a parent is to somehow accept that you are powerless." It's intense stuff, but hopefully Zeller can get some sleep now. **ALEX GODFREY**

ANDOR IS A show packed full of surprises, few bigger than the one in its opening episode, when a synth-heavy dancefloor anthem kicks in. A viral standout in Nicholas Britell's riveting score, 'Niamos! (Morlana Club Mix)', brings a new edge to the show. "People on Instagram have been sending me videos of themselves playing it in their car," says the in-demand composer. "Someone said, 'We're bringing this to the club!' I'm just like, 'Great, let's do it!'" Talking to *Empire* "in the midst of formulating ideas" in his LA studio for *Succession*'s upcoming fourth season, Britell breaks down his *Star Wars* hit.

INSPIRATION

Andor's score is a thrilling departure from the traditional orchestral *Star Wars* sound. The starting point for Britell was Diego Luna's rogue rebel. "Cassian is trying to understand himself," he says. "And so I really wanted the music to feel like it was trying to understand itself." The first beats of 'Niamos!' are heard in the series' opening moments, when Cassian strolls into a seedy nightclub. "I was approaching it as a club that happens to be in a different galaxy, and it has to feel right for that place," Britell explains. "So I wrote a track that feels like it's playing on their sound system." In the seventh episode, a version of the track would return, as the sandy planet Niamos is introduced.

INSTRUMENTATION

The show's creator, Tony Gilroy, and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy gave the Emmy-winning composer the freedom to write what he wanted. That generous creative licence led to the Daft Punk-ish synthesisers that make 'Niamos!' sound so distinct from what's come before in the *Star Wars* universe. "There was an added layer of detuning that I was doing on the synthesisers to give it sort of a non-Earthly feel," explains Britell. "I wanted it to feel not just like it's not from here, but also like there's something maybe even a little wrong."

IMPLEMENTATION

Britell used variations of 'Niamos!' throughout the show, embedding it into the fabric of *Andor*'s world. "There were sequences where there would be music playing at an event on [capital world] Coruscant," he explains. "So I remember saying to Tony, 'What if the 'Niamos!' track was a well-known intergalactic hit in the galaxy? What if they're doing a lounge version of it on Coruscant?' So each time you hear it, it's a different version of itself." A meta *Star Wars* chart-topper with intergalactic appeal? Let's hope Max Rebo has a cover in the works.

AMON WARMANN

Above: What a *Star Wars* nightclub might just look like.

Below: Composer Nicholas Britell, a man for whom the *Death Star* is the galaxy's biggest disco ball.



ANDOR IS ON DISNEY+ NOW

THE SON WILL BE IN CINEMAS IN 2023

No./16

The road to the role of a lifetime

Danielle Deadwyler on the performances that led her to **TILL**

IF DANIELLE DEADWYLER hasn't landed on your radar yet, her performance in *Till* will ensure she is soon going to. With her searing portrayal of Mamie Till-Mobley, a mother demanding justice for the racial violence inflicted on her murdered child Emmet (Jalyn Hall), Deadwyler's work looks set to carry her straight to awards season. She walks *Empire* through the roles that prepared her for this powerhouse performance.

THE HAVES AND THE HAVE NOTS

(2013-2021)

Tyler Perry's soapy crime drama saw Deadwyler play fan-favourite La'Quita 'Quita' Maxwell, a short-tempered antagonist grappling with the mysterious absence of her brother. "I know girls like her, I've had feelings like her," says the actor. "Somebody who's doing everything they possibly can to get by, even if it might be fucked up." Quita might be less of a saviour than Mamie, but both performances sprung from "a hyper-honest place" that Perry helped her reach, Deadwyler says. "He keeps you on your toes and you better be ready for anything," she adds.

THE HARDER THEY FALL

(2021)

Jeymes Samuel's groundbreaking Black Western had a host of big names like Jonathan Majors, Regina King and Idris Elba, but Deadwyler stood out as gender-fluid sharpshooter Cuffee. Like Mamie, she is based on a real-life person — soldier Cathay Williams, who posed as a man in

the American Indian Wars. "I engaged with Cathay's history: folks who wanted to ascend, who were resisting," says Deadwyler. "Wanting to get to a different level of liberty, to make your own way; that's what the West is, right? You can make your own identity outside of the way people want to perceive you."

STATION ELEVEN

(2021-2022)

Deadwyler held her own as Miranda, the author and artist of the titular graphic novel, in Patrick Somerville's dystopian series starring Himesh Patel, Gael García Bernal and Mackenzie Davis. Weirdly timely, the show concerned the before, during and after of a pandemic. "Miranda was in search mode," Deadwyler says. "What would you do in the midst of tragedy if you knew it was coming?" As with *Till*, she injects a deep level of interiority into her performance. "Without words is just a part of the nature of dance for me — language is beyond speaking," she says. "We neglect the face but that's a part of movement. Silence is abundant."

TILL

(2022)

As Mamie, Deadwyler strives to break the silence that fuels racial hatred in Chinonye Chukwu's biopic. The actor and filmmaker worked together to find out who Mamie was beyond a bereaved mother. "We dug into the script over and over, trying to get to the heart of who she was as a human," Deadwyler says. The process of distinguishing the line between how

Danielle Deadwyler as Mamie Till-Mobley, with Frankie Faison and Sean Patrick Thomas. Below: Deadwyler in *The Haves And The Have Nots*, *The Harder They Fall* and *Station Eleven*.



the public saw Mamie and who she was in private struck a chord with the actor. "That's just a part of my own personal performance art," she says. "The public and private nature of a Black woman's labour." The end result is one that you won't want to miss. **HANNA FLINT**

TILL IS IN CINEMAS FROM 13 JANUARY 2023

No./17

REBORN RETURNS

Mark Wahlberg's **Father Stu** is the latest film to return to its cinematic birth canal. We investigate



FATHER STU: REBORN (2022)

WHAT IS IT? A true-story religious drama, with Mark Wahlberg playing Father Stuart 'Stu' Long, a boxer-turned Catholic priest.

HOW IS IT REBORN? The original R-rated film has had its un-Christian salty language cut to earn a PG-13 rating. Congratulations, it's a (less sweary) boy!



JEEPERS CREEPERS: REBORN (2022)

WHAT IS IT? A straight-up reboot of the horror franchise about the Creeper, a demon who feasts on body parts.

HOW IS IT REBORN? Jarreau Benjamin takes over Creeper duties from Jonathan Breck. It was a troubled rebirth, however, when producers were sued by *Jeepers Creepers* 2's makers. Call the midwives!



JOHNNY ENGLISH REBORN (2011)

WHAT IS IT? Rowan Atkinson's spy spoof sequel sees MI7's finest once again save the world, clumsily.

HOW IS IT REBORN? Johnny English does some slapstick soul-searching at a Tibetan monastery, but here 'reborn' is just another way of saying 'Johnny English 2'. It's twins!



DRAGON BALL Z: FUSION REBORN (1995)

WHAT IS IT? The bizarre 12th entry in the popular anime film series, which features zombies and a resurrected Adolf Hitler.

HOW IS IT REBORN? Heroes Goku and Vegeta do a 'Fusion Dance' and are reborn into one entity. Mother and (fused) babies are doing well! **JOHN NUGENT**



BLACK IN FOCUS

AMON WARMANN chews over the main moment in Black film and TV this month

SHOULD BLACK ADAM HAVE BEEN PLAYED BY A MENA ACTOR?

WHEN *BLACK ADAM* blasted into cinemas last month, it reignited a conversation: was The Rock the right man to play the DC antihero? The debate wasn't a reflection of his talent or performance: the star's physique and charisma make him a natural fit for a superhero (so much so, his spandex debut feels long overdue). Instead, many wondered whether a MENA actor ought to have played the part, given the film's Middle-Eastern inspirations.

In *Black Adam*, Johnson's character hails from Kahndaq — a fictional country clearly based on Egypt. It's a role that could have benefited from being played by someone from the region instead of a Black American star with Samoan heritage — especially given the historic lack of opportunities for MENA actors in Hollywood.

I get why Johnson appears in the film. He's been attached to the role since 2007, when Hollywood didn't have the same sensitivities regarding diversity and representation as it does now. But a lot has changed in the 15 years since (and even since 2014, when Christian Bale played Moses in *Exodus: God And Kings*). We as a viewing culture now demand more from our onscreen representation. It's no longer enough to put any actor of colour into roles — they should ideally reflect the region that their character has roots in.

That evolution is



Between a Rock and a hard place? Dwayne Johnson as the DC antihero Black Adam, who comes from a country believed to be based on Egypt.

sadly not reflected by *Black Adam*. Star power is valuable (and Johnson has that in spades), but it shouldn't come at the expense of MENA actors. Their culture is often mined by Hollywood for blockbusters (see also: *Dune*). They shouldn't be overlooked for parts in those stories in the process.

Moon Knight is a perfect example of what can happen when effort is made to approach this properly. Egyptian-Palestinian star May Calamawy was able to bring authenticity to a Marvel show that's partially set in the Middle East, in ways that a non-MENA actor might not have been able to. The show's final episode, in which her character Layla El-Faouly comes into her own as a hero, was made all the more gratifying as a result.

Calamawy is not alone. There are plenty of other up-and-coming MENA talents waiting in the wings to elevate Hollywood projects set in the Middle East or otherwise. Giving opportunities to other exciting rising stars such as Amir El-Masry (*Limbo*), Aiysha Hart (*We Are Lady Parts*), Razane Jammal (*The Sandman*) and others will lead to a richer, more diverse movie landscape. There's a bright future ahead should Hollywood commit to getting MENA representation right.

CLASSIC PICK OF THE MONTH

SPIDER-MAN: INTO THE SPIDER-VERSE (2018)

Miles Morales makes his big-screen debut in this animated masterpiece. Striking, colourful visuals combine with a sensational score and bold storytelling that beautifully captures the essence of the titular hero. In other words... it's the best Spidey movie ever made. Don't @ me.



Mindcage

Unfiltered, uncensored, uncompromising trailer reactions from team **EMPIRE**

John Nugent (Reviews Editor): This film is already funny to me because it reminds me of *Mindhorn*.

Ben Travis (Deputy Online Editor): It reminds me of *30 Rock*, where Tracy Jordan is always talking about his mind-grapes.

Alex Godfrey (Features Editor): There's also that thing in *Bowfinger*; isn't there?

Nick de Semlyen (Editor): Chubby rain?

Alex: No, Mindhead.

Nick: I feel like there's a big *Seven* vibe here, but they should call it 'Fourteen' because it looks twice as good.

James Dyer (Digital Editor-In-Chief): Look at the expression on that priest, given he's just found a dead body covered in feathers. He looks mildly perturbed at best.

Alex Godfrey: He's going, "That's not Jesus?"

James: "There's something up with this, and I can't quite put my finger on it."

Beth Webb (News Editor): We don't know this poor man's life; he could've seen much worse things than a human statue with massive wings. Or this could be a regular problem for him.

James: That is one scary angel.

Alex: She looks like a prop from a Beyoncé concert. Or Björk in *The Northman*.

Beth: I bet it's Tilda Swinton. This feels like something Tilda would do.

Nick: It looks like it could be Margot Robbie.

Alex: I wonder if she fights a snake, like in *Babylon*?

James: She needs a manicure.

Nick: Is that a statue or a real person?

James: I originally thought it was a statue, but looking at it now, it's clearly a human.

John: It's a real person. It's clearly a major plot point in the film.

Joanna Moran (Photography Director): It's really easy to follow.

Nick: I mean on the set, not in the film.

Beth Webb: I think it's an actor in a somewhat thankless role.

John: It's reminding me of *Red Dragon* with all the angel imagery, only without feeding anyone to Gary Oldman's pigs.

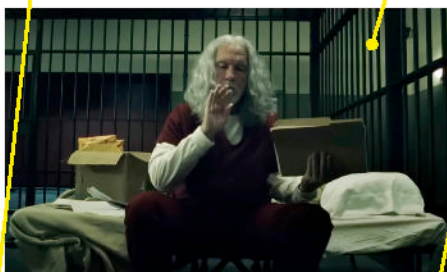
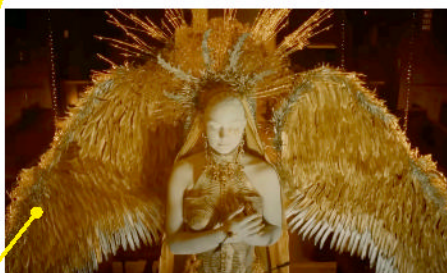
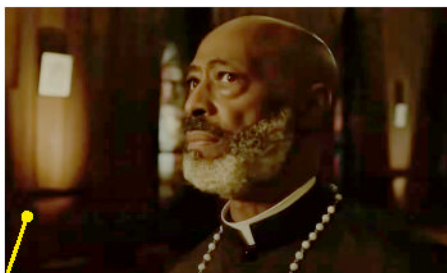
Beth: I bet the killer's got a massive tab at Hobbycraft. Look at all those feathers.

Mike Cathro (Deputy Art Director): It's a fairly elaborate way to kill someone. He must have a fair bit of cash.

Beth: Okay, this is a man who has racked up a serious body-count but never forgets to use conditioner.

Alex: John Malkovich here looks a lot like the cowardly lion in *The Wizard Of Oz* to me.

James: It's giving off more of a late-in-life



Weird Al vibe.

Ben: The hair especially reminds me of Laurie Strode in the new *Halloween* films.

Sophie Butcher (Social Media Editor): He looks like an extra on *House Of The Dragon*. Like an elderly Targaryen who can tell some great stories.

Alex: Do you think they had a mood-board with all of these references on it?

Joanna: I was going to say, it feels like someone has made a Pinterest board of all of these movies that were big in the '90s: we've got a hot female lead, a cynical old detective. A lot like *Seven*, a lot like *The Silence Of The Lambs*. But I'm quite excited for it — it feels like a film I can sit down of an evening and relax to.

Nick: John Malkovich just having a smoke and minding his business...

Mike: ... in this cage! Oh! I've just got it!

Beth: There we go.

Mike: It reminds me of *The Cube* — you know, that Saturday-night TV game show with Phillip Schofield? With all the tasks in a cube?

James: I thought you meant the Vincenzo Natali film.

Sophie: I'm waiting for that woman in the fencing outfit that demonstrates what the task is to turn up.

Beth: He looks like he could throw a ball into a small box from a great distance.

Mike: This looks like there could be some sort of supernatural element to it.

Beth: I'm really hoping there's a supernatural element to it.

Nick: That book has a great title.

Beth: The book cover gets right to the point. No messing around here. They don't even waste space by naming the author.

James: Malkovich looks a lot like a Viking here.

Beth: This is truly the *Northman* crossover that I'd like to see. Maybe we will see Björk.

James: Is it one word: Mindcage? They've come up with a completely new word.

Nick: This film is coming out in the US on the same day as *Avatar 2* — what an epic double bill.

Joanna: There are blue people in both.

Beth: So we're agreed: these are not statues.

Ben: I think that we can all agree that we're in the Mindcage now. I don't think there's any escape.

Nick: I'd never heard the word "Mindcage" until today, and now I've heard it 16,000 times.

MINDCAGE DOES NOT YET HAVE A UK RELEASE DATE



INTRODUCING...

Frankie Corio

THE 13-YEAR-OLD ACTOR MAKES HER BREAKTHROUGH OPPOSITE PAUL MESCAL IN BUZZY INDIE *AFTERSUN*

ON LANDING THE ROLE

My mum found this advert for a role on her teaching page on Facebook, and sent in a photo of me. After that I had to go to Glasgow twice for auditions — and then I got the part. I'd never done any acting before at school — it was brand-new and so cool.

ON WORKING WITH PAUL MESCAL

He's still one of my best friends. When we weren't filming we'd hang out in our trailers and just sing Olivia Rodrigo together. 'Good 4 U' was our favourite. We had a lot of handshakes as [our characters] Callum and Sophie and hung out loads before filming, which helped us get closer to each other. And we practised a lot of breathing and mindfulness with the director, Charlie [Wells], as well.

ON SPENDING HER BIRTHDAY ON SET

I got a big, massive cake, and we went to the amphitheatre in Turkey with all the ruins, because we were there for two weeks before filming, like a holiday. It was really hot, but it was really fun. And Paul got me a video from Olivia Rodrigo saying, "Happy birthday."

ON FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

I definitely want to keep acting. I basically want the whole *Stranger Things* cast to see this film. I don't know a lot of directors yet but I really want to work with Millie Bobby Brown.

ELLA KEMP

AFTERSUN IS OUT NOW



No./18

Indie horror bites back

In a year of big box-office wins and Oscar rumours, the genre is entering an exciting new era

"ONCE REPORTS CAME out about people fainting and vomiting, it was off to the races." Damien Leone has had one hell of a year. His sequel to his 2016 slasher *Terrifier* has been a surprise box-office hit, received a government warning from Australia on account of its gory murders at the hands of an evil clown and, wildly, has been submitted to the Oscars. And it's just one of a handful of trailblazing indie horrors earning big bucks and high praise from fans of the genre. Leone in part attributes his "pull no punches" approach to filmmaking — a scalping and castration feature in *Terrifier 2* — for the film's success. "I think we're becoming tired of sterile, psychological horror films or ghost stories," he says. "Horror is cyclical and it may be time for the slasher genre to resurface for a while. Let's have some fun!"

Word-of-mouth has proven vital to this new wave of horror. Two other box-office sensations — *Smile* and *Barbarian* — weren't even intended to be released in cinemas. Thanks to encouraging test screenings and word-of-mouth hype, that all changed. *Smile*, about a psychiatrist who believes a supernatural

entity is causing traumatised patients to do terrible things, has crossed the \$200 million mark with a boost from a viral marketing campaign that saw actors smiling creepily at baseball games. *Barbarian* — which raked in over \$43 million worldwide on a \$4.5 million budget — triumphed on account of its buzzy, twisty premise, which kicks off when a stranded woman stays overnight in a double-booked Airbnb. "Whether you like or don't like the movie, nobody saw what's coming," director Zach Cregger tells *Empire*. "The only reason this movie has had the life it has is because people have told their friend, 'You've got to see this.' I'm more proud of that than anything."

And the genre's not just leaving its mark financially. Oscar buzz is circling Mia Goth's unsettling performance in the Martin Scorsese-endorsed *Pearl*, the Technicolor prequel to Ti West's '70s-set slasher *X*. Earning comparisons to Kathy Bates in *Misery*, Goth's disturbing depiction of an aspiring actor with violent tendencies includes a single-shot, nine-minute monologue and an MGM-musical-inspired dance sequence with a scarecrow. Could this be the Academy's time to embrace horror again? We'd bet a killer clown on it.

BETH WEBB



M. Night Shyamalan brings horror home

With **KNOCK AT THE CABIN**, the filmmaker goes back to basics in style

IT'S BEEN OVER 20 years since Haley Joel Osment's Cole whispered, "I see dead people," in M. Night Shyamalan's milestone horror *The Sixth Sense*. In that time the filmmaker has brought us superhero movies (*Unbreakable*, *Glass*), a lavish psychological thriller TV show (*Servant*) and a gnarly body horror (*Old*). Now

with *Knock At The Cabin*, a home-invasion story, the filmmaker appears to be going back to those stripped-down, scary roots.

"I'm drawn to older ways of telling stories," Shyamalan tells *Empire*. In this case, the story is loosely adapted from Paul G. Tremblay's *The Cabin At The End Of The World*, which sees a vacationing family pressured to make a horrific decision by a mysterious group convinced that the apocalypse is coming. Shyamalan originally boarded the adaptation as producer and screenwriter, but felt compelled to direct as he was drawn further into the story. "It's one of our primary fears, because our home — or a proxy of



No. 20 Who won the battle of Westeros vs Middle-earth?

Which delivered the most jaw-dropping first season: **House Of The Dragon** or **The Lord Of The Rings: The Rings Of Power**? **Empire** casts an eye over the evidence...

!
SPOILER
WARNING

THE RINGS OF POWER

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON

The show packed in menacing Snow-trolls, drooling Wargs and more Orcs than you could shake a wizard's staff at. A special shout-out to the mountainous bastard in Episode 6 who comes within millimetres of Arondir's eye with a blade; now *there* was one ugly mother-orc-er.

Barely an episode went by without a truly stunning scene involving House Targaryen's flying fire-breathers, from Leana's impromptu one-woman barbecue in Episode 6 to Aemond's thrilling dragon joyride in Episode 7. Talk about saying dracarys to the competition.

SNARLING MONSTERS

MENACING VILLAINS

JAW-DROPPING VISTAS

EPIC BATTLES

SHOCK ENDINGS

OVERALL WINNER
THE RINGS OF POWER

Villains don't come any more chilling or iconic than Sauron, do they? Even if he does have a Yorkshire accent. Over the course of Season 1, we got to see an even more duplicitous side of the legendary dark lord, as he manipulated from the shadows.

Who is the season's big baddie? Hard to say; most of the cast are sly schemers out for their own gain. Matt Smith's Daemon has had downright dastardly moments, but we've seen his softer side too, with the show so far lacking a tyrant as deliciously hateable as Joffrey or Ramsay.

The show's Mount Doom-sized budget meant that its picturesque backdrops dwarfed anything we'd seen on screen before. Quite literally in the case of the most stunning Middle-earth location in Season 1: the dwarven kingdom of Khazad-dûm. True Tolkien majesty.

The show's focus on the Targaryen dynasty didn't have the variety of epic locales that its predecessor packed. Still, it's hard to beat a swooping shot of King's Landing in all its red-roofed glory, especially when Vhagar is patrolling the skies in the distance.

Nothing says "epic" more than the Orc attack on the Southlanders, that culminated with a volcano exploding moments after battle. Fierce close-quarters sword play, athletic bow-and-arrow shenanigans and a rainstorm of molten rock? Yeah, that'll do the trick.

Sure, Matt Smith single-handedly slicing through legions of crab-men on a beach was impressive. Then came that soaring showdown in the sky in the final episode — a dragon-back battle that will have huge consequences in Season 2.

The show's final-episode Sauron reveal rewarded those with a keen eye — especially after an early misdirect in the show's finale and some season-long romantic tension between Galadriel and the evil bastard himself.

The death of Jacaerys in Season 1's stunning climax means that truces are torn up and war is afoot as the show heads into its second season. Gripping? Absolutely. A shock? Not really.

AL HORNER

Clockwise from left: Abby Quinn, Nikki Amuka-Bird, Dave Bautista and Rupert Grint; The Airbnb wasn't quite what they were expecting; Cabin fever; Shyamalan on set.

our home — is a place where we feel very safe," he says, when speaking of the film's relatability. "When we get that knock at the door, our fears make us think, 'Wait a minute, this is all a façade. Anyone can come in here and do whatever they want.'"

Shyamalan wanted the filmmaking to be as simple and impactful as the premise. He shot on film and sourced old camera lenses from the '90s for the present-day elements of the story. For a series of flashbacks in the film, he looked for even older ones. "They were barely functional," he remembers. "At certain focal lengths they would become out of focus. All of those imperfections are part of it." The filmmaker additionally wanted to bring a mythical quality to the film's finished look. "It's very much a dark fairy tale," he says. "There's a little girl that's sitting in the grass playing, and a giant comes up and shakes her hand and says, 'Something's gonna happen to your family.'"

The giant in question is played by Dave Bautista in a rare horror role, although his character, Leonard, is far from a straight-up villain. Shyamalan describes Leonard as almost literally having the weight of the world on his shoulders, as he believes that the family's failure to make said horrific decision will end humanity. The filmmaker sought out the actor off the back of his performance as the gentle replicant Sapper in *Blade Runner 2049*. "There was a sadness coming off him that was a complete contradiction to the 300 lb of muscle that was standing there," he recalls. "I'd never seen this kind of vulnerability in someone who looks like that."

Although Shyamalan promises some major plot changes to Tremblay's book, the mood will remain the same: sinister yet strangely hopeful. "I'm always feel-good about everything," he says. "I love telling dark stories and I'm going to guide you through some really horrific things, but you can feel the narrator believes in humanity." This may not be a film where characters can see dead people, but if this is Shyamalan going back to basics, his audience might not be so lucky. **BETH WEBB**

KNOCK AT THE CABIN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 3 FEBRUARY 2023



JOIN THE CLUB!

This October, 100 *Empire* readers were able to attend a very special screening of the year's biggest film, ***Top Gun: Maverick***, alongside some of its creators. Legendary producer Jerry Bruckheimer was accompanied by co-producer Christopher McQuarrie and editor Eddie Hamilton, taking part in a special Q&A, exclusively for **Empire VIP Club** members.

If you're not already a VIP, it's the ultimate way to experience *Empire* — as well as getting access to events like July's star-studded premiere of *The Gray Man* and August's screening of *Rogue One* and Q&A with the *Andor* cast, you'll also get the chance to see advance previews of movies ahead of everyone else, and get **exclusive VIP-only access** to virtual events, such as the Inside *Empire* series, featuring conversations with the *Empire* team. So don't delay — for the buzziest nights out (and in), become a VIP member today!



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PINT OF MILK

ASA BUTTERFIELD

Do you have a signature dish?

Yeah, I make a pretty good Thai red curry — a peanuty curry. With roasted veg.

When were you most starstruck?

When I saw David Attenborough at a screening of *Our Planet*, the Netflix documentary series, at the Natural History Museum. I didn't even speak to him. I was too terrified to go up to him. So it's either him, or when I met Ian McKellen. I had a chemistry read with him for the film *Mr. Holmes*, which was quite surreal. In my head he's always Gandalf The Grey.

How much is a pint of milk?

Erm... it's probably, like, 80p.

What movie have you seen the most?

It's got to be *The Lord Of The Rings*. I can't think of any film I would've seen more than that. It's my comfort film, so I watch it every year — the whole trilogy, in fact. I've loved them since I was a kid. Still do. Those movies occupy a very special place in my heart. I think they're an incredible feat in filmmaking. You don't really get movies like that anymore.

What's in your pocket right now?

Nothing. I've actually got a blanket draped over me, and I'm in my underwear. No pockets!

What's your favourite animal?

A leopard. I like all the big cats, but leopards are particularly impressive. They climb trees, and they're smaller than a lot of the big cats so they have to be clever as they go about their activities.

What scares you?

Not a whole lot, honestly. Weirdly, performing on stage scares me, or being in front of big crowds, which I know is counterproductive being an actor. If there's a camera on me I'm fine. I hated horror movies as a kid. They gave me sleepless nights for weeks. Just a trailer for a horror would send me into a spiral. But I enjoy them now.



ILLUSTRATION ARNO

Whose poster did you have on your wall as a kid?

I had a *Lord Of The Rings* poster on my wall, of course. Then when I got a bit older, I had an old-school *Godzilla* poster, with Japanese splash writing on it, and block colours. It was quite arty.

What's your earliest memory?

I remember when I was about five or six, going on the trampoline we had in our garden — one of those little ones with a handle that you hold onto as you jump on, and I remember jumping too high, and flipping over the top of the handle and smacking my face into the ground and being

quite upset. And I remember pushing my cousin off the trampoline. He would usually get the better of me in play fights, but I managed to push him off the trampoline. My dad said I had the biggest grin on my face when that happened.

What's the worst smell in the world?

I've got quite a story about this, actually. So last year I had Covid, and my sense of smell and taste went. When they came back, something weird happened, which I think is one of the symptoms of Long Covid. I was eating this veggie fake-mince pie and it tasted beefy and garlicky and a bit weird. The next day I could still smell and taste this sort of horrible beefy garlicky flavour even after I brushed my teeth. And I couldn't get rid of it — the taste and the smell. There was this garlicky, beefy aroma around all foods, except maybe cakes and sweet stuff. And I would be walking down the street and suddenly get a whiff of the smell. It really ruined food for me for a couple of months. But now I'm back to normal. Thank God.

Do you have any tattoos?

I do. Funnily enough I went for a tattoo consultation yesterday to get a new one. I've got one tattoo so far — it's of three birds sat on a wire. It's on my arm. It's partly inspired by the Bob Marley song 'Three Little Birds', and I like what birds represent generally, without wanting to sound too poncey about it. **BOYD HILTON**

COMING SOON

SEX EDUCATION: SEASON 4

(TBC)

Butterfield's affable teen Otis returns with his band of hormonal pals and progressive mum (Gillian Anderson), in the wake of Moordale High being forced to permanently close its doors.

ALL FUN AND GAMES

(TBC)

Stranger Things' Natalia Dyer co-stars with Butterfield in this horror about two siblings and their sadistic cousin, who summon an evil entity known as The Skarrow while playing a game.

YOUR CHRISTMAS OR MINE IS ON PRIME VIDEO FROM

2 DECEMBER

25 NOV
-16 DEC

BIG SCREEN. SMALL SCREEN. YOUR REVIEWS BIBLE STARTS HERE

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★★★ OKAY ★★ POOR ★ AWFUL

[EDITED BY JOHN NUGENT]



[FILM]

GLASS ONION: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY

★★★★★

OUT 23 NOVEMBER (CINEMAS),
23 DECEMBER (NETFLIX) /
CERT TBC / 139 MINS

DIRECTOR Rian Johnson

CAST Daniel Craig, Edward Norton, Janelle Monáe, Kathryn Hahn, Leslie Odom Jr., Jessica Henwick, Madelyn Cline, Kate Hudson, Dave Bautista

PLOT Eccentric billionaire Miles Bron (Norton) invites his favourite friends and “disruptors” to a private Greek island for a murder-mystery party. When a guest actually dies, it’s up to detective Benoit Blanc (Craig) to once again solve the case.

WHETHER YOU’RE A detective or a director, taking on a new case is always tricky. The last time Rian Johnson made a sequel (2017’s *The Last Jedi*), he nearly broke the internet, or at least the corner of it that likes to argue about *Star Wars*; the last time gentleman detective Benoit Blanc solved a case (in 2019’s *Knives Out*, Johnson’s part love letter to, part subversion of the Agatha Christie murder-mystery genre), he nearly fell into a metaphorical doughnut-hole.

This follow-up to *Knives Out* — the first of a massive, multi-million-dollar deal made with Netflix — establishes the Christie-esque precedent that Benoit Blanc is the only recurring element in the series; a new case and a new cast of characters will appear in each entry. So as much as this is technically a sequel, it feels more like the latest entry in an ongoing anthology, a singular story that can be enjoyed purely on its own terms.

That’s not to say there aren’t commonalities with the original, and in fact this is very much more of the same: a delightful retread of everything that made *Knives Out* so deeply satisfying (it’s still, arguably, Johnson’s strongest work). There



Clockwise from left: Bond wouldn't stand for these wheels; Miles Bron (Edward Norton) in discussion with Duke Cody (Dave Bautista); Returning PI Benoit Blanc (Daniel Craig) with Andi (Janelle Monáe).

is, once again, a mysterious crime that self-awarely references the genre as it goes (the first film was set in a crime novelist's home, mirroring the author's fictional crimes; this is set during a weekend-long murder-mystery game). There are bodies and blood-splatters. There are twists and misdirects, rewarding repeat watchers. There is a final summation and big reveal, in the equivalent of a drawing room.

But it all looks and feels markedly different, and not just in the budget flexes Netflix can now afford. Where *Knives Out* was a claustrophobic, autumnal, New England kind of whodunnit—evoking the gothic suspense of *Sleuth* or the arch wit of *Clue*—Johnson opts for a completely different setting here: a summer holiday gone wrong, his take on Christie's *A Caribbean Mystery*, or more accurately, Stephen Sondheim's *The Last Of Sheila* (and Sondheim in fact earns a brief, brilliant posthumous nod in this film).

This time, too, Blanc is no longer “merely a passive obsuh-vuh of the truth”—he's an active player in the case. A character previously introduced in an out-of-focus background shot

now comes to the foreground: we learn a little about his personal life, his insecurities, his proclivity for taking long baths while wearing a fez, and his extensive collection of linen neckerchiefs.

As such, he feels more rounded as a character, both narratively—Johnson is keen to emphasise his empathy and wisdom—and comedically, blessed with more delicious “Southern hokum”, as Blanc himself self-deprecatingly puts it. (Those who enjoyed the “doughnut holes” of the first film will take particular succour in the way Craig repeatedly wraps his lips around the word “buttress”.) Spending time in Blanc's company remains a singular pleasure, and if this is to be an ongoing affair, as it appears to be, there's every chance Blanc will be as defining a role for Craig as Bond.

He is surrounded, naturally, by another superb collection of potential murderers/murder victims, Johnson once again showing his knack for drawing from an embarrassment of acting riches. (If anything, it's *too* good a cast, with superlative talents like Kathryn Hahn given

less to do.) You could pick a different favourite each time you think about it, but particular praise must go to Janelle Monáe, showing versatile comedy chops for the first time in a complex role that requires both drunken pratfalls and if-looks-could-kill stares; and Kate Hudson, having a blast as an endlessly cancelled fashionista with a penchant for tweeting racial slurs.

They are all extremely funny, and with that change of scenery from the first film comes a change of tone, lightening as the weather brightens. The first film seemed like a mystery with some comic peppering; this feels more like a comedy first, mystery second. Sometimes there's a slight sense that the wackiness could have been reined in a little—there are, by our count, nine celebrity cameos drizzled throughout, plus cheeky references to celebrity product endorsements, which begins to feel a little overindulgent.

More often, though, it offers a sack of onions' worth of fun, as uproarious as the best comedies. Importantly, too, the laughs are buttressed—there's that word again—by a gorgeously constructed script, a maze-like narrative that unfurls slowly and gratifyingly like a puzzle box (appropriate, given the film begins with a literal puzzle box). If the denouement doesn't quite have the same sting of surprise as the first film's, you will still leave feeling supremely satisfied. It is, fundamentally, a proper crowd-pleaser, and best experienced with one. To misquote Blanc: it just makes damn sense. Onto the next case!

JOHN NUGENT

VERDICT A fizzy, gaudy, joyfully entertaining couple of hours. If there's any right in the world, Rian Johnson and Daniel Craig will continue making films in the Benoit Blanc Cinematic Universe forever.

Black Panther
returns...



Top to bottom: Tenoch Huerta as Namor Okoye; Okoye (Danai Gurira) and Shuri (Letitia Wright); Winston Duke as M'Baku.

[FILM]

BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER



OUT NOW / CERT 12A /
161 MINS

DIRECTOR Ryan Coogler

CAST Letitia Wright, Tenoch Huerta, Angela Bassett, Danai Gurira, Winston Duke, Dominique Thorne, Michaela Coel, Martin Freeman

PLOT Following King T'Challa's death, Shuri (Wright) and Queen Ramonda (Bassett) struggle to move on. And the power vacuum triggers a goldrush for Wakandan resources — sparking conflict with Namor (Huerta).

FOR ALL OF its blockbuster bombast and globe-trotting conflict, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* is, in a sense, framed around just one person: Chadwick Boseman. The loss of the *Black Panther* star, who tragically died in 2020, isn't just taken as a logistical problem for the franchise to fix. There's real pain behind this film. In addressing Boseman's passing, returning director/co-writer Ryan Coogler and co-writer

Joe Robert Cole movingly and tastefully blur the lines between the real and the fictional.

That loss — of Boseman in real life, and T'Challa within the film — becomes ambient, ever-present. The stages of grief form the trajectory of the film: T'Challa's sister Shuri (Letitia Wright), angry and vengeful, takes refuge in technology, while mother Ramonda (Angela Bassett), devastated but clear-minded, finds it in spirituality — as though the dual elements of its Afrofuturist setting have been split in two. All of them struggle to continue with their lives. Death, as the characters remind us, is not the end.

The tragic circumstances lead to an increased focus on this formerly supporting cast, but the shift feels natural, and there are strong, absorbing performances across the board. In particular, Letitia Wright — stepping up into a leading role — finds compelling volatility for Shuri to take the spotlight. Elsewhere, Winston Duke's bluster is still a joy to watch; Angela Bassett is commanding and heartbreaking; newcomers like Michaela Coel fit in as though they were always there.

Namor, meanwhile (Tenoch Huerta, a magnetic presence), makes for a unique antagonist. He's a highlight, an imaginative adaptation of the comics character, one who here speaks truth with convincing venom. Coogler ties him and Talokan to Mesoamerican history and Spanish colonialism, and there's a sense — like Wakanda — of a tangible, real-world history. In both Wakanda and Talokan, there is beautiful

costuming and production design from Hannah Beachler and Ruth Carter, respectively; and lush photography from Autumn Durald, who maintains precision and clarity in the action.

Namor's heritage brings with it some exciting quirks, too: from the wings on his ankles to the use of a hypnotic siren song; to the orcas and whales deployed as battle-mounts. For the most part, *Wakanda Forever* is imaginative and feels grounded, which makes the tilt to the usual CG-dominated spectacle a little jarring.

In the same sense, the film can feel overly busy. Coogler's script sometimes strains at having to stuff it all in, from the fallout of T'Challa's death to the geopolitical turmoil between Wakanda and Talokan to the usual extended-universe baggage. It all sprawls into a messy last act that can feel at odds with the rest of the film.

But *Wakanda Forever* ultimately lands on a poignant note. In bookends, it deals head on with the passing of both T'Challa and Boseman, moments that pull the film into a moving, surprisingly personal, whole. Even in his absence, Boseman holds *Black Panther* together. **KAMBOLE CAMPBELL**

VERDICT *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* stands out from a somewhat formulaic era of Marvel movies: held together by its compelling sense of place, and by acting as a passionate eulogy for Chadwick Boseman.

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Catastrophically she'd picked up the superglue instead of the moisturiser.

[FILM]

BONES AND ALL



OUT 25 NOVEMBER /
CERT TBC / 130 MINS

DIRECTOR Luca Guadagnino

CAST Taylor Russell, Timothée Chalamet, Mark Rylance, Michael Stuhlbarg, André Holland, Chloë Sevigny, David Gordon Green, Jessica Harper

PLOT America, the 1980s. Teenager Maren (Russell) is abandoned by her father (Holland) after her cannibalistic urges become too much to bear. With the help of fellow cannibal Lee (Chalamet), Maren searches for her mother and a better understanding of herself. But sinister older cannibal Sully (Rylance) seems to be on their tail.

BONES AND ALL seems, at first glance, to be another entry in the 'Sexy Vampires' canon. Strictly speaking, the blood-sucking heroes of Luca Guadagnino's seventh film are a kind of cannibal-vampire hybrid, chowing down on flesh just as much as blood, with the ability to smell one another. But flesh-eating is really only half the story; as with the book by Camille DeAngelis on which it is based, this is a simmering, softly played

story, told with both tenderness and violence.

An understated character study of burgeoning sexuality in the 1980s, it feels very much of a piece with *Call Me By Your Name*, Guadagnino's masterful, Italy-set 2017 romantic drama. So when the first act of cannibalism arrives in the opening few minutes, with a finger suddenly bitten clean off, it hits like a hammer: this is not just another bite of the peach.

It's played beautifully and believably by Taylor Russell as Maren, the finger-biter in question, carrying the film with an unguarded, raw energy. She's playing much younger than her actual age, but shows the same captivating naivety and sense of sexual awakening that made Timothée Chalamet a star in *Call Me By Your Name*. Reuniting with Guadagnino here, Chalamet is almost an elder statesman, a slightly more experienced cannibal showing Maren the ropes, and together they forge a nomadic life on the road together, sharing a fiery, unpolished chemistry.

There are all sorts of outsider allegories you can read into the cannibalism. At the start of the film, Maren lives in a rundown, one-bedroom mobile home, and seems quietly jealous of her wealthy, white suburban friends, a racial and class anxiety that seems to bleed into her bloodlust; it's impossible, too, not to find a queer reading here, even in heterosexual characters. Lines like, "I thought I was the only one," could have been plucked straight out of a gay coming-of-age drama.

But it's a story that can just as easily be taken

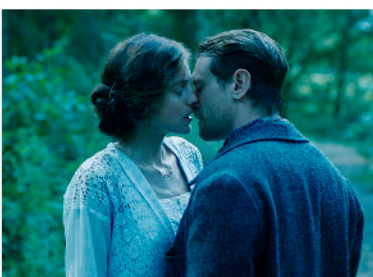
at face value. Unlike his last toe-dip into genre, the ambitious but misguided *Suspiria*, Guadagnino doesn't force the audience's hand with a message. This is a contained character study about the most human of passions and desires, wrapped up in inhuman tastes.

Guadagnino is interested, too, in different responses to abnormal urges. Everyone has their own form of ethics. Michael Stuhlbarg (in a horrifying *Call Me By Your Name* reunion with Chalamet) plays a hillbilly who espouses eating human bones, while Mark Rylance offers a typically precise performance as a lonely cannibal drifter who only eats the nearly dead — as shudderingly creepy as he is morbidly funny. ("I ate my own grandad," he offers, matter-of-factly.)

For most of the film, the director finds extraordinary beauty in the grit of the Midwest, criss-crossing America to an evocative period soundtrack, so it's almost a shame that the final act has to end in more formulaic genre fashion. But blips are rare here. This is a devastatingly romantic road movie, one that will make your heart ache as easily as your stomach churn.

JOHN NUGENT

VERDICT Part arthouse-*Twilight*, part John Hughes-ian coming-of-age romance, part *Bonnie And Clyde* cannibal remix, part dreamy Wim Wenders-esque road trip. This is gorgeous, gruesome work from Luca Guadagnino.



LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER

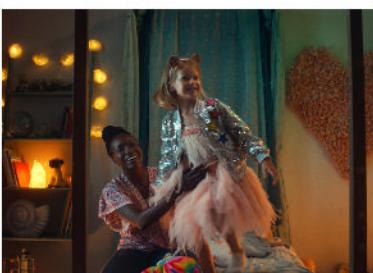
★★★

OUT 25 NOVEMBER (CINEMAS), 2 DECEMBER (NETFLIX) / CERT TBC / 112 MINS

DIRECTOR Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre

CAST Emma Corrin, Jack O'Connell

An early-20th-century novel deemed so salacious it was banned from publication until 1960, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* has long been an exciting prospect for film adaptation. Now attempting to faithfully translate to the screen the carnality and desire between Constance Chatterley (Emma Corrin) and her lover Oliver Mellors (Jack O'Connell) is Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre (*The Mustang*), who brings a keen eye for sensuality. Corrin and O'Connell shine, but there is a disappointing lack of truly hot-blooded eroticism in this version, which feels underwhelming. Still, while not offering anything revolutionary to the period drama, it is a mostly engaging watch, lit up by moments of visual beauty. **CQ**



NANNY

★★★★

OUT 25 NOVEMBER (CINEMAS), 16 DECEMBER (PRIME VIDEO) / CERT 15 / 98 MINS

DIRECTOR Nikyatu Jusu

CAST Anna Diop, Michelle Monaghan

There's much to admire in writer-director Nikyatu Jusu's feature debut: a haunting atmosphere, and the African folktales of Anansi the Spider and the water spirit Mami Wata. But beneath the surface is some thematically rich storytelling encompassing Black womanhood and the struggles of the American Dream, anchored by a captivating performance from Anna Diop as Aisha, the nanny of the title. Veering away from *Get Out* territory, Jusu's film offers a distinct voice, as horror clichés are ditched for a focus on Aisha's life and the African diaspora. Its slightly muddled plot and somewhat rushed ending lightly threaten to undo that profound work, but Jusu does enough to keep it compelling. **KE**

School buds Amanda (Winter Jarrett-Glasspool), Nigel (Ashton Robertson), Matilda (Alisha Weir), Lavender (Rei Yamauchi Fulker) and Eric (Andrei Shen).



[FILM]

MATILDA THE MUSICAL

★★★

OUT 25 NOVEMBER / CERT PG
117 MINS

DIRECTOR Matthew Warchus

CAST Alisha Weir, Emma Thompson, Lashana Lynch, Stephen Graham, Andrea Riseborough

PLOT Matilda (Weir) is a child genius trapped in a family of monsters. She hopes things will improve when she's sent to school to be taught by the kindly Miss Honey (Lynch). But sadistic headmistress Miss Trunchbull (Thompson) is determined to make her life a living hell.

ROALD DAHL'S 1988 novel *Matilda* was a late-career highlight, an empowering story about a girl with extraordinary mental gifts caught in the clutches of very ordinary monsters: uncaring parents and a cruel head teacher. In 2010 it became a hilarious and magical musical by Dennis Kelly and Tim Minchin, and now the director of that show, Matthew Warchus, has brought it to the big screen. There are still traces of the stage hanging about this adaptation, but it hits more high notes than bum ones.

The key is Alisha Weir as Matilda, singing, dancing and convincing as a little girl who discovers strange mind-powers even beyond her extraordinary intellect. Weir plays the steely gaze and reserve of a girl who has been kicked around by life since she was born, and avoids too much stage-school cutesiness. But one of the nice things about both book and show is that Matilda is not quite a one-girl army. She has a loyal best friend in Lavender (Rei Yamauchi Fulker) and a brave — if greedy — classmate in Bruce Bogtrotter (Charlie Hodson-Prior). They lead a whole mob of funny, weird kids to bring

down their school's terrifying principal, Miss Trunchbull.

In that role, Emma Thompson goes big. On stage, Trunchbull was played by a man in drag, the better to communicate the vast size of the former Olympic hammer-thrower, but Thompson manages the same trick with an American football team's worth of padding and some iron-soled platform shoes. She's widened her jaw, scraped back her hair and disappeared into a genuinely threatening grotesque — the sort of teacher who considers it a life goal to break as many spirits as possible. A baddie who is almost entirely without redeeming features, Trunchbull's backstory includes murder and mayhem as well as mass child abuse, and it's utterly delightful to see her comeuppance.

The rest of the adult cast have less to do, but do it well. Lashana Lynch is lovely, and an impressive singer as Miss Honey, playing against her usual action heroine type. Stephen Graham and Andrea Riseborough are also worlds away from their usual highbrow drama and clearly relishing the change of pace. And Sindhu Vee is warm and kind as librarian Mrs Phelps. It takes a village, in the end, to save a child.

Despite extensive use of real locations and exterior scenes, the film cannot always escape its staginess, mostly because the pacing is theatrical rather than cinematic; just under two hours would be brief for a stage show but it's lengthy for a family film. There are too many establishing scenes of Matilda's life, and the fable she tells Mrs Phelps, largely created for the stage, drags on a bit before hitting its emotionally effective crescendo. Some of Minchin's witty lyrics get lost in the sound mix as well, which is a shame. But overall it's hard to argue with a girl this bright and brave. Matilda remains a superb role model, for all that she's a little bit naughty. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT A sugar-fuelled thrill, this boasts a fine young cast and pleasantly pantomime adult roles. It may be too long for younger kids, but tweens are going to love it.



[FILM]

GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO



OUT 25 NOVEMBER (CINEMAS)
/ 9 DECEMBER (NETFLIX) / CERT PG
/ 117 MINS

DIRECTORS Guillermo del Toro, Mark Gustafson
CAST Gregory Mann, David Bradley, Ewan McGregor, Christoph Waltz, Tilda Swinton, Ron Perlman, Finn Wolfhard, Cate Blanchett, John Turturro

PLOT Ten years after his son dies, Italian sculptor Geppetto (Bradley), wracked with grief, carves a new boy from a pine tree. Introduced to a world of fascism and exploitation, Pinocchio (Mann) is encouraged to do as he's told — but he's not totally on board with that.

EARLY ON IN *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*, in a church, the little wooden boy — a gnarly, twisted, ramshackle figure, new to the world but already causing consternation due to his mere appearance and unruly behaviour — peers

up at a huge, wooden sculpture of the crucified Christ. "Why do they love him, and not me?" Pinocchio asks his father of the recoiling locals. "They sing to *him*." Your heart murmurs; your soul shudders. This isn't what you expect from *Pinocchio*.

No other adaptation of Carlo Collodi's 1883 novel has done what Guillermo del Toro does. That discomforting, chilling, confrontational little scene is a microcosm of this stop-motion odyssey, bringing together many of its themes — a child's confusion (and sadness), the forces that frown upon him for his uniqueness, a father's struggle to make his son — and himself — happy. Del Toro has his name glued to the title for good reason — not for glory, but as a warning. This is not a cute film. It's more *The Devil's Backbone* than Disney, *Pinocchio* by way of *Pan's Labyrinth*.

You know how the story goes: the brat mucks about, tells lies and must learn to behave. But that's not quite the run of things here. If anything, this is an ode to disobedience, set in the late 1920s during Mussolini's early reign, where, as del Toro has said, everyone in Italy acted like puppets. And it is not mere allegory. Mussolini is *in* this film, which does not shy away from its preoccupations — authoritarianism, mortality, death, loss. So, very much a del Toro joint.

Co-writing the screenplay with Patrick



McHale (*Adventure Time*), del Toro — who directs alongside stop-motion supremo Mark Gustafson — gets dark fast. Geppetto (David Bradley) and his flesh-and-blood son Carlo (Gregory Mann) are blissfully happy until, suddenly, Carlo dies, tragically, brutally. Grief-stricken, Geppetto loses his way, finally breaking down in a drunken rage at Carlo's grave, pledging to recreate him there and then, carving a wooden boy (also Mann) from a tree in the middle of the night. Given life, Pinocchio makes his way through the world, navigating exploitative con-artists and fascists, who want to



Clockwise from left: *Wooden it be nice?* — Pinocchio, voiced by Gregory Mann; Italian road trip; I'm your puppet: With Geppetto (David Bradley)

smooth off his edges or, worse, make him sing patriotic propaganda.

The film is a cry for independence, and the aesthetic follows suit. Taking inspiration from artist Gris Grimly's spiky, spindly take on the character, del Toro's Pinocchio looks like what such a creature probably *would* look like, especially one created via a drunken rage. He is a misshapen tree monster. Nails stick out of him haphazardly. He only has one ear. Other characters are just as idiosyncratic. The Blue Fairy is now more like a godlike gargoyle, a benevolent wood sprite played by Tilda Swinton, who also voices her less sympathetic sister, Death, who visits Pinocchio intermittently. Both have wings peppered with blinking eyes; both are spine-tingling creations that usher the film into a metaphysical realm. And the mighty sea beast is, of course, magnificent, a great Lovecraftian brute.

In the nuance, too, there is artistry to spare, to swoon over. A priest's sunken eyes and sullen cheekbones. Shards of sunlight slicing through Geppetto's roof into the attic. The ribs on a dog. It's all a bit jagged... as is the film itself. Maybe it makes sense that this paean to imperfection is not perfect. There are songs, which are *fine*, but feel a little misplaced. And the film is not always as emotionally engaging as it might like to be. But it does get there in the end. And what a touching ending it is: a deeply human, grown-up deviation from Collodi's original.

Which sums it all up. Del Toro is never enslaved by the novel, yet remains faithful to its spirit: its playfulness, its cynicism, its anarchy — and its heart. And here, Guillermo wears his *own* heart — and soul — on his sleeve. It is the most philosophical, existential *Pinocchio* adaptation yet. It gets in your bones. **ALEX GODFREY**

VERDICT Guillermo del Toro's perspective runs through every frame of this unique retelling, which isn't afraid to tackle troubling themes. A sincere, soulful exploration of what it means to be human.



Girl power: Carey Mulligan and Zoe Kazan.

[FILM] SHE SAID

★★★★★

OUT 25 NOVEMBER / CERT 15
128 MINS

DIRECTOR Maria Schrader

CAST Carey Mulligan, Zoe Kazan, Patricia Clarkson, Andre Braugher, Jennifer Ehle, Samantha Morton, Ashley Judd

PLOT *New York Times* journalists Jodi Kantor (Kazan) and Megan Twohey (Mulligan) begin work on a new investigation: several women, off the record, speak about years of sexual abuse at the hands of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. But what will it take for them to speak on record?

JOURNALISTS ARE RARELY interesting enough to be the centre of a film. There's a reason we tell other people's stories — shining a light on incredible, singular human beings doing things the world previously thought impossible. But as with *Spotlight* or *All The President's Men*, sometimes the journalists *become* the story. Such as five years ago, when *New York Times* journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey broke the story of Harvey Weinstein's abuse and misconduct in Hollywood.

It's for this reason that *She Said* is something of an anomaly. It's not a standard film about journalists, nor another run-of-the-mill condemnation of Hollywood. It's both, and it's more — a meta-commentary on the injustices that continue to permeate journalism and filmmaking, and a galvanising portrait of tired women finding the strength to keep going. There's no heroic sentimentality, nor epic stakes being raised: the cold, hard reality of what happened is enough.

She Said deftly avoids the trappings of potential performative feminism — the kind of female-led films that make for neat marketing

about girlboss culture or the reductive pigeonholing of all interesting women into "strong female characters". Kantor and Twohey are two exceptional journalists, but they're also both burnt-out mothers: Carey Mulligan beautifully portrays Twohey's exhaustion and unexpected postnatal depression as a new mother, only a few weeks before she joined Kantor on the Weinstein investigation. And it's a joy to see Zoe Kazan take command as a lead actor again (her last major lead role was in *The Big Sick*, released around the same time as the Weinstein story broke). Her role as forever-juggling Jewish mother-of-two Kantor sees her constantly trying to prove herself; nobody, it seems, manages to see past her meek demeanor.

Much of the film's strength comes from its care towards young female characters — in how the script protects those worried about speaking out, while finding the right language for unspeakable acts. How do you protect yourself without ruining your own life? Director Maria Schrader already showed her skill at deftly framing women trapped by circumstance in miniseries *Unorthodox*, about a Jewish woman leaving her religious community, and here she spotlights the women of the film industry terrified of telling the truth with sensitivity and subtlety.

There are brief flashes of something resembling a Hollywood biopic, especially in the score by Nicholas Britell, which evokes his sombre work on *Succession* rather than the delicate emotion infused into his scores for Barry Jenkins. But Mulligan and Kazan ground this film with immense power. There's no fake sass or manipulative drama, only the truth: sober, righteous investigation, bringing justice to women who have suffered for too long. **ELLA KEMP**

VERDICT No frills are needed to tell this once-in-a-generation story. Any concerns for a film about the unglamorous world of journalism are avoided thanks to sharp performances, sensitive direction, and one irrefutable truth: these women won.



NEPTUNE FROST

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 105 MINS

DIRECTORS Saul Williams, Anisia Uzeyman

CAST Cheryl Isheja, Elvis Ngabo, Bertrand Ninteretse

For their directorial debut, Saul Williams and Anisia Uzeyman have built an Afrofuturist vision of identity. It focuses on the character of Neptune, as they begin a binary-blasting transitional journey, changing hands between actors Elvis Ngabo and Cheryl Isheja, singing poetic songs to liberate their voice after society has suppressed it. The fluidity of *Neptune Frost* extends into every dimension of its craft: it is set in Burundi but shot in Rwanda; the songs and dialogue weave between Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Swahili, French and English. It moves visually between natural landscapes to digital ones, from spiritual calm to neon-coloured urban junk. *Neptune Frost* finds cohesion in its messiness, throwing everything it can into being different — yet always recognisably human. **LC**



ENOLA HOLMES 2

★★★

OUT NOW (NETFLIX) / CERT 12A / 129 MINS

DIRECTOR Harry Bradbeer

CAST Millie Bobby Brown, Henry Cavill, Louis Partridge, Helena Bonham Carter

This sequel to the YA Netflix hit retains much of the charm from the first movie. There's playful action and quick-witted humour — especially in Enola's casual breaking of the fourth wall, which makes the most of Millie Bobby Brown's impeccable comedic timing — and a complex mystery that cleverly ties into Victorian historical events. Brown and Henry Cavill's Sherlock retain their great chemistry, but the story loses momentum in its efforts to set up a potential third film, and several characters feel wasted, including Helena Bonham Carter's Eudoria and Louis Partridge's Lord Tewkesbury. Despite the missteps, it's still a solid successor filled with satisfying twists while exploring themes of feminism and class disparity. And that, as Enola might say, is a job well done. **LS**



THE MENU

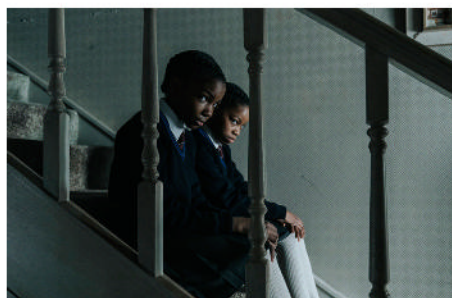
★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 106 MINS

DIRECTOR Mark Mylod

CAST Anya Taylor-Joy, Nicholas Hoult, Ralph Fiennes, Hong Chau

The Menu begins as a dressing-down of opulence before transforming into a trashy genre thriller. It may not be very thrilling, but it's surprising and amusing enough, following newly minted couple Margot (Anya Taylor-Joy) and Tyler (Nicholas Hoult) as they arrive on a secluded island for an exclusive fine-dining experience courtesy of world-famous chef Julian Slowik (Ralph Fiennes). The concept menu turns oddly personal, as Slowik waxes poetic about his philosophies and imbues his theatrical presentation with a violent streak. The film is delightfully silly at times, even if the unfurling plot fails to gather much tension or momentum. While Fiennes' delectable performance belongs in a gourmet thriller, *The Menu* is pure deep-fried junk; it might not fully satisfy, but it'll fill a hole. **SK**



THE SILENT TWINS

★★★

OUT 9 DECEMBER / CERT TBC / 113 MINS

DIRECTOR Agnieszka Smoczyńska

CAST Letitia Wright, Tamara Lawrance, Jodhi May, Michael Smiley

The bond between twins is a complex thing in Agnieszka Smoczyńska's English-language debut, a biographical drama that tells the true story of June (Letitia Wright) and Jennifer Gibson (Tamara Lawrance). Growing up in 1960s Wales, the sisters were the only Black children in their class, where they were severely bullied, leading to them receding from the outside world and speaking only with each other. The racial element to their bullying is a detail that Andrea Seigel's screenplay (adapted from Marjorie Wallace's 1986 book of the same name) should have explicitly addressed; nonetheless, committed, physical performances from Wright and Lawrance provide pathos, and the film's consistently inventive visuals help draw us into the twins' heads. **AW**



CHARLOTTE

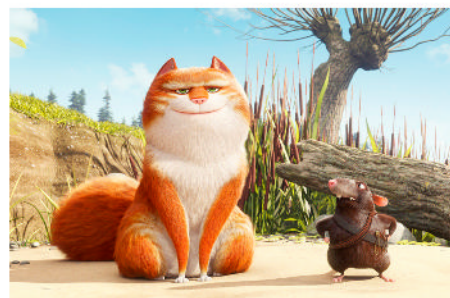
★★★

OUT 9 DECEMBER / CERT 12A / 92 MINS

DIRECTORS Tahir Rana, Éric Warin

CAST Keira Knightley, Jim Broadbent, Sam Claflin, Eddie Marsan

Painter Charlotte Salomon has drawn comparisons to Anne Frank: like the diarist, she was a young Jewish-German woman forced into hiding during World War II, who took refuge in her art — art that would ultimately outlive her, forming a first-hand account of a tragic, violent history. This mostly affecting film retells her story in a way designed largely for a young-adult audience, which means occasionally clichéd storytelling. For an account of an unconventional artist, the animation is disappointingly conventional, too — unlike, say, the impressionistic artwork of Van Gogh biopic *Loving Vincent*. Still, a righteous take on historical events and strong voice-work from Keira Knightley and Jim Broadbent make for an ultimately emotional, humane viewing experience. **JN**



THE AMAZING MAURICE

★★

OUT 16 DECEMBER / CERT PG / 90 MINS

DIRECTOR Toby Genkel, Florian Westermann

CAST Hugh Laurie, Emilia Clarke, Himesh Patel, David Tennant

Given that it's adapted from a Terry Pratchett tale, it makes sense that *The Amazing Maurice* displays moments of real smarts. The tale of a precocious cat running a Pied Piper-style hustle with a troupe of rodents and a human companion begins by drawing attention to its own framing device, and frequently breaks the fourth wall from there. But despite a self-aware screenplay and a super-starry voice cast (David Tennant plays a rat named Dangerous Beans), *Maurice* is bound by generic animation and ties itself in narrative knots, firing off in multiple directions, too distracted by deconstructing itself to tell an engaging story. Add in gratingly over-eager performances, and it's at once oddly grown-up and frustratingly kiddie. **BT**



This clearly wasn't the right room for Advanced Accounting.

[FILM]

BARDO, FALSE CHRONICLE OF A HANDFUL OF TRUTHS



OUT 16 DECEMBER (NETFLIX)
CERT 15 / 160 MINUTES

DIRECTOR Alejandro González Iñárritu

CAST Daniel Giménez Cacho, Griselda Siciliani, Ximena Lamadrid, Jay O. Sanders

PLOT When US-based film director and journalist Silverio Gama (Cacho) wins an award, he returns to his Mexican hometown. There, he must confront his life, career, and family — through an increasingly surreal and existential journey.

NOW MORE THAN ever, filmmakers are making films about filmmaking: Steven Spielberg, Sam Mendes and Paolo Sorrentino have all been at it lately. No self-made quasi-biopic is likely to be quite as strange — or as self-indulgent — as Alejandro González Iñárritu's latest, a film as vast in ambition as it is nakedly pretentious in execution. In Buddhism, “bardo” describes the

liminal state between death and rebirth; on screen, *Bardo* is the cinematic state of having your cake and eating it.

It's a hard film of which to get the measure. The plot, such as it is, concerns Silverio Gama (played by Mexican actor Daniel Giménez Cacho, whose salt-and-pepper beard and hair invites a conspicuous comparison to Iñárritu himself), a renowned Mexican filmmaker who makes an unexpected trip to his hometown from his Los Angeles base in order to receive a lifetime achievement award. The timing of the award seems to chime with an existential reckoning in which Silverio tries to get to grips with his marriage, children, nationality, and grief over an apparent stillborn baby.

There is a straightforward midlife-crisis story here, but — leaning into the same playful continuity and eccentric humour of his Oscar-winning film *Birdman* — Iñárritu keeps reality at arm's length; the seams between scenes are forever phantasmagorically fuzzy, magical-realist flights of fancy at every turn. That throw-the-rulebook-out approach can be as thrilling as it is frustrating. There is some bravura filmmaking on show here, epic in scope, but there's an emptiness to some of it too, so bonkers as to be stripped of all meaning.

Bardo is, therefore, the very definition of a “mixed bag”. Sometimes it is bizarrely beautiful, such as the serenely dreamlike opening sequence, which offers a bird's-eye-view of an unseen figure

making superhuman jumps across a Mexican landscape. Sometimes it is grotesquely excessive and didactic, as when Silverio climbs a mountain of corpses, bluntly symbolic of Mexico's bloody history. Sometimes it is just near-insufferable, such as the excruciating moment in which Silverio begins to go down on his wife, only for a CG baby — an unwelcome recurring character — to rudely emerge from her vagina.

Bardo at least looks spectacular, with cinematographer Darius Khondji finding strange beauty in everything from mass migration to a maternity ward. And amid the unrestrained silliness, there is an earnest attempt to grapple with ideas of identity and self, especially as an immigrant alienated in two cultures.

“Success has been my biggest failure,” Silverio says at one point (during a scene, incidentally, in which his face has been transplanted onto the body of a small boy — don't ask). Like many lines in this script, it seems to be Iñárritu talking about himself, at once introspective and self-important, a film engaged in a dialogue with its own director. Whether it's a conversation you're willing to listen to will depend on your fortitude. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT *Bardo* sees director Alejandro González Iñárritu looking at the man in the (hall of) mirrors; the result is visually sensational but sometimes lethally patience-testing.



The Flash will be wanting a word.

[FILM]

BLACK ADAM

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 12A
125 MINS

DIRECTOR Jaume Collet-Serra

CAST Dwayne Johnson, Pierce Brosnan, Aldis Hodge, Sarah Shahi, Noah Centineo

PLOT Nearly 5,000 years ago, in the Middle Eastern country of Kahndaq, the superpowered Teth-Adam (Johnson) took on a tyrant king and then vanished. In the present day, with Kahndaq now mercenary-ruled, Adam is re-awakened — and must face up to both the modern world and his own past.

THE DC FILM universe has, for nearly a decade now, been pinballing between the lightness of *Shazam!* or *Wonder Woman* and the grim violence of *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*. With *Black Adam*, Dwayne Johnson and director Jaume Collet-Serra attempt to offer a grand unified theory of DC, mixing family-film tropes with a protagonist who straight-up murders people. The result is sometimes a mess, but it's a generally entertaining one.

As is traditional, a complicated prologue set in 2600 BCE introduces a superpowered hero who then disappears. Cut to the present day, and the vaguely scholarly freedom fighter Adrianna (Sarah Shahi) goes to visit an ancient tomb (as is also traditional). She reads out an inscription and, whaddya know, lightning strikes to release Teth-Adam (Dwayne Johnson) to battle the enemies who threaten her, and their shared homeland of Kahndaq. Adam is so powerful, however, that soon Viola Davis' Amanda Waller gets the Justice Society involved. They're led by flying fighter Hawkman (Aldis Hodge) and magic-user Doctor Fate (Pierce Brosnan), who bring

newbies Atom Smasher (Noah Centineo) and Cyclone (Quintessa Swindell) to stop this threat.

There's never much doubt where all this is going. Black Adam clearly isn't *that* bad, given how he bonds with Adrianna (a largely undeveloped character) and her likeable son Amon (Bodhi Sabongui). And the Justice Society, while rightly accused of only caring about Kahndaq's plight when a superpowered being arises there, are clearly well-meaning. There's obviously going to be a greater threat to come. But first Collet-Serra stages some fun, destructive action scenes. Brosnan's a standout: his powers are extremely Doctor Strange-y, but he has a fatalistic sense of the future and a lightness of touch that feels fresh. The film also wisely doesn't pretend that Black Adam is ever in much danger: it's only a question of how angry he gets, and who's hit in the crossfire.

Still, that weird contradiction remains: Johnson and Collet-Serra want edge, but without alienating family audiences. So you get massive action scenes with no obvious civilian casualties. It's all nicely shot in low-lying sun and dusty vistas, but suffers the weightlessness that gives superhero movies their bad name: great power, no responsibility.

The film's key strength is the sense that superpowers can be terrifying. Johnson, far more stony-faced than usual, shows a sort of bemused amorality, and his killing of bad guys seems as natural as breathing. The idea of a superhuman who fights for his oppressed people is also a solid one, and an interesting challenge to the usual small-c conservative superheroes who just save a few individuals from baddies. Black Adam may not make his world better — not yet — but he shows the potential to shake up the DC Universe in ways that may yet succeed in uniting its disparate elements. **HELEN O'HARA**

VERDICT Big, dumb and only mostly fun, this doesn't always find the right tone to marry action and charm, but Johnson's remote and ruthless superhero is a welcome change.



CALL JANE

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 12A / 121 MINS

DIRECTOR Phyllis Nagy

CAST Elizabeth Banks, Sigourney Weaver, Chris Messina, Kate Mara

Director Phyllis Nagy — best known as the screenwriter of Todd Haynes' *Carol* — brings humour and heart to this fictionalised story of the Jane Collective, a group who provided safe but illegal abortions during the late '60s. Housewife Joy (a wonderful Elizabeth Banks) is denied a legal abortion even though her pregnancy will almost certainly kill her, and finds a literal lifeline on a poster telling her to "Call Jane". She's soon enveloped by the warmth of Sigourney Weaver's group leader Virginia, and is inspired to join the movement. Hardly as revolutionary as the activists from whom it draws inspiration, *Call Jane* is nonetheless a charming, compassionate story of a fight for justice. **LV**



TORI AND LOKITA

★★★★

OUT 2 DECEMBER / CERT 15 / 89 MINS

DIRECTORS Jean-Pierre Dardenne, Luc Dardenne

CAST Joely Mbundu, Pablo Schils, Alban Ukaj, Charlotte de Bruyne

Revisiting themes explored in 1996's *The Promise*, the Dardennes unflinchingly confirm that migrants are regarded as money-spinning workhorses by Europe's predatory underworlds. Joely Mbundu and Pablo Schils excel as the children who tell the Belgian authorities they are siblings, despite respectively hailing from Cameroon and Benin. But the Dardennes are more concerned with their mistreatment by a drug dealer and a trafficking church official. By setting the tragedy in an everyday urban locale, they also implicate the viewer's apathy in allowing such injustice. This could happen in anyone's back yard. Simmering with fury, this is social realism at its most damning. **DP**



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Jenna Ortega takes a bow as Wednesday Addams.



Top to bottom: Heads up! It's Gwendoline Christie as Principal Weems; Luis Guzmán, Catherine Zeta-Jones and Isaac Ordonez as the other Addamses; The kids are all-fright.

[TV]

WEDNESDAY

★★★★

OUT NOW (NETFLIX)
EPISODES VIEWED 8 OF 8

SHOWRUNNERS Alfred Gough, Miles Millar
CAST Jenna Ortega, Emma Myers, Hunter Doohan, Gwendoline Christie, Christina Ricci, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Luis Guzmán

PLOT After being expelled from high school, 15-year-old Wednesday Addams (Ortega) is exiled to her parents' old educational haunt, Nevermore Academy. Despite it being a special institution for "Outcasts", the sociopathic Wednesday doesn't fit in. Also, someone there is trying to kill her.

THE BEST THING about Barry Sonnenfeld's kooky-spooky *Addams Family* movies was Christina Ricci's Wednesday Addams. Pig-tailed, dead-eyed, looking as fragile as porcelain but really as deadly as a nail gun, she stole both shows. So, on the one disembodied hand, she's the ideal subject for a spin-off series, here spawned by *Smallville* guys Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, and in a no-brainer of no-brainer

moves, lead-directed by Tim Burton; on the other hand, however, Ricci's a tough act to follow.

Fortunately, *Wednesday* has a not-so-secret, toxin-tipped weapon: Jenna Ortega. Formerly seen in *You* and *Scream*, Ortega is a worthy match to Ricci as the OGG (original goth girl), and receives her implicit blessing via Ricci's guest spot as carnivorous, plant-loving den mother Miss Thornhill. In fact, Ortega meets a far greater challenge than her predecessor ever faced: preserving the now-teenage Wednesday's barbed demeanour over an eight-episode arc, while also allowing her to develop, just a little, as a person. She has to evolve enough for us to keep caring and not dismiss her as one-note, while never betraying Wednesday's darkly precious sociopathy and succumbing to (ugh) *growth*. And Ortega pulls it off with grave-faced aplomb. It's a mini masterclass in less-is-more performance.

What's less successful, sadly, is the setting, as impressively realised as it is (by production designer Mark Scruton). The Addams Family have always worked best in relief, their morbid foibles accentuated when placed against a backdrop of normality, where regular folk are often aghast at their antics. Supernatural boarding school Nevermore Academy, however, draws Wednesday into a mix of characters in many ways odder than she is: werewolves, gorgons, sirens and other strangenesses.

Wednesday is also given plenty to kick against, including her own long-shadow-casting

mother Morticia (faithfully portrayed by Catherine Zeta-Jones, even if she doesn't glide quite so magnificently as the films' Anjelica Huston and lacks the required chemistry with Luis Guzmán's Gomez). Even so, the early episodes clang to the sound of an ever-present question: surely Wednesday should feel right at home here?

In this sense, having Burton at the helm of the first four doesn't actually help. Gothic flourish is his stock-in-trade, and he doesn't hold back. But a little stylistic restraint might have been more effective. The season focuses on matters more crowdpleasing than intriguing, making Wednesday the ass-kicking anti-hero of the day as she unravels a series of twisted killings (some surprisingly gruesome for the 12 rating) in a very *Harry Potter*-ish mystery plot.

Praise the dark lord, then, for Ortega, the unblinking eye of this eldritch Gen Z storm. Despite its flaws, she makes the show supremely watchable for Addams fans and newcomers alike. Without a doubt, she is *Wednesday*'s MVP (most venomous predator). **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT The high-school adventures of Wednesday Addams are less '*Mean Girls* with monsters' and more '*gothed-up Harry Potter*'. You might have hoped for better for *The Addams Family*'s best character, but at least she's perfectly pitched by Jenna Ortega.



Prince (Michiel Huisman) and Bambi (Luke Evans): no trakkie bottoms at the airport for them.

[TV] ECHO 3



EPISODES VIEWED 5 OF 10
OUT NOW (APPLE TV+)

SHOWRUNNERS Mark Boal, Jason Horwitch
CAST Jessica Ann Collins, Luke Evans, Michiel Huisman, Bradley Whitford, Martina Gusmán

PLOT While researching psychedelic drugs in a Colombian jungle, American scientist Amber (Collins) is kidnapped by rebel forces. Her brother Bambi (Evans) and husband Prince (Huisman) — both elite special-ops soldiers — take it upon themselves to rescue her. But there are larger political forces at play.

“THIS ISN’T JASON Bourne,” says a character in an early episode of *Echo 3*. It feels like a pointed observation, and an unusually meta piece of writing for a show that generally leans towards groundedness. But it’s true: this is not Jason Bourne. While at first glance it might seem to share some tough-as-nails DNA with the famed rogue CIA spook, there are more lofty ambitions at play here, a project far more couched in realism and modern-day international politicking.

The series was created by Mark Boal, a war reporter-turned-double-Oscar-winner for *Zero Dark Thirty* and *The Hurt Locker*, working with director Kathryn Bigelow. Boal and Bigelow took a journalistic approach to those films, with scripts buoyed by deep research and a holistic look at how the geopolitical context impacts the characters. You sense that approach everywhere here, even though it is an adaptation of the original Israeli drama *When Heroes Fly*.

That transfer means this hard-bitten story — about high-profile kidnapping, the military-industrial complex, and the deep-seated effects of US imperialism in South America — takes on an

entirely new meaning with American characters taking the lead. Boal’s viewpoint is cynical and complex, offering a bleak view of US foreign policy, and there’s not much room for sunniness or texture in its tone.

Yet, impressively, it’s all couched in a deeply human story. The trio of lead actors do decent work with tricky, sombre roles, selling the intensity and anxiety of getting lost in an unfamiliar land. Luke Evans, in particular, is quietly revelatory, disappearing into a Southern accent and a Rambo-style militarism, a world away from his *Strictly Come Dancing* crooning.

Any worries, too, that the South-American setting might be window-dressing for an Americocentric story are swiftly assuaged: Martina Gusmán, as a prominent political journalist in Colombia with her own history of kidnapping, offers a different perspective, and the show is unafraid to spend long stretches without a single word spoken in English. Even the Colombian rebels are given a rounded view, showing them as political revolutionaries: violent and dangerous, yet still politically canny enough to worry about “losing the media narrative”. As well as directing the odd episode himself, Boal also recruits South-American directors — Pablo Traperó takes on four of the ten; Oscar-nominated Claudia Llosa helms Episode 3, a standout — who are able to bring certain nuances of the region that other filmmakers might miss.

That directing is astonishingly strong across the board, in fact — especially in the many fiery set-pieces, which include a mountain-top hostage rescue versus the Taliban and a jungle offensive with what seems like the entire Colombian military. The might of Apple’s deep pockets means production values are staggeringly high. But even in a firefight, Boal’s intelligent writing rarely loses focus on the bigger picture. **JOHN NUGENT**

VERDICT Tough, tense and thoughtful, this is a deeply grown-up thriller — and more compelling journalistic filmmaking from co-showrunner Mark Boal.

SCREEN CHECKLIST

Your at-a-glance view
of this month's reviews



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ONE LAST

SINCE 1981, INDIANA JONES HAS BEEN THE WHIP-CRACKING, WISECRACKING ACTION HERO TO BEAT THEM ALL — BUT THE WORLD'S GREATEST ADVENTURER IS FINALLY READY TO HANG UP HIS HAT. AS STAR HARRISON FORD, DIRECTOR JAMES MANGOLD AND MORE REVEAL, IT'S GOING TO BE AN EMOTIONAL FAREWELL

QUEST



WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN



2023 **PREVIEW**



THE YEAR IS 1969

A man named Harrison Ford, near the start of his professional life, is in Los Angeles. The 27-year-old has recently filmed a small role ('Arrested Student') in *Zabriskie Point*, a highly experimental Antonioni film which features slow-motion explosions set to Pink Floyd. That had been a peculiar experience. But nothing compared to what he is doing now. Staring at jawdropping images unfolding on a TV screen, having what feels like an out-of-body experience.

"It was very surreal," Ford tells *Empire*. "I remember very distinctly the men landing on the moon, because I was with Jacques Demy and Agnès Varda in Beverly Hills. Agnès refused to face the television because she was putting pictures in an album. And she refused to look at it because she believed it was all faked. And so that's my distinct personal memory of the moon landing."

Around Ford, America was changing, at seemingly the speed of a lunar lander. Troops were being dispatched to Vietnam. Jim Morrison had been arrested; copies of John Lennon's new album confiscated by police. Protests roiled around the nation, lamenting injustices. And yes, a 44,000 kg lump of metal was blasted into space, taking with it three Americans all the way to the

surface of the moon: the Apollo 11 mission. It was an astonishing, wild, invigorating time to be alive.

Unless it wasn't.

The year is 1969. A man named Henry Jones Jr, near the end of his professional life, is staring retirement in the face like it's a swaying cobra. After decades of quests mingled with academic lessons, in which he's dispensed mountains of textbooks and whipped his way through endless hair-raising scenarios, he's facing the grim truth: it's all over. Compounding matters, the country he loves is transforming around him. This old-fashioned hero is now a man out of time. He will not, it's safe to say, be going to see *Zabriskie Point*.

But he has forgotten one thing. That if adventure has a name, it must be Indiana Jones. And adventure isn't done with him yet.

In 1989's *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, the fedora-wearing archaeologist rode off into the sunset. In 2008's *Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*, he loped down a wedding aisle. At the time, both seemed like a full stop at the end of one of the greatest, most joyous cinematic



Clockwise from top left: Keep up with the Jones! The professor hits the street; Mads Mikkelsen as the villainous Voller; Mikkelsen with director James Mangold on set; Phoebe Waller-Bridge unleashes her inner action hero as Indy's goddaughter Helena.

sagas of all time. Yet Indy kept getting back up and dusting himself off. That, says producer Kathleen Kennedy, was down to its star just not being able to let the role go. "It was something Harrison very, very much wanted to do," she explains of the as-yet-untitled fifth instalment. "Steven [Spielberg] was kind of off and on about it. But we all felt that if we could conclude the series with one more movie, given the fact Harrison was so excited to try to do another one, we should do it."

Ford, speaking to *Empire* via Zoom from Montana, where he's currently shooting *Yellowstone* spin-off *1923*, is a little more circumspect. "I didn't feel it was *necessary* to do another one," the 80-year-old says in his famous growl. "I just thought it would be nice to see one where Indiana Jones was at the end of his journey. If a script came along that I felt gave me a way to extend the character."

The quest began almost as soon as *Crystal Skull* hit cinemas. That movie, with its swinging monkeys and flying fridges, hadn't quite hit the spot for many fans. "You never set out to do anything except make a great movie," says Kennedy. "And sometimes you hit that perfectly, and sometimes you don't. In the case of 'Indy 4', I don't think there's any specific thing that any of us looked back on, except that we may not have had as strong a story as we wanted." For the wrap-up to the series, all were determined to come up with an emotional throughline that would bid adieu to Dr Jones in high style. But it proved a time-consuming process. Years ticked away. And in what seemed to be a major blow, the two men who had created Indiana Jones in the first place stepped away. First went George Lucas, who sold Lucasfilm to Disney in 2012, and would no longer play a creative role in the series. ("George is in Chicago, raising children," says Ford. "We just talk about, you know, a possible Tuscan vacation".) Then went Steven Spielberg, who had directed all four previous films, but announced in early 2020 that he would not be shooting the fifth, though he would remain on board as producer.

Replacing Spielberg seemed as daunting as switching a Peruvian fertility idol with a bag of sand, and potentially as dangerous. They needed somebody with the chops to pull off an action-packed, non-stop spectacle, but who could also handle nimble comedy and rich character work. It was Ford who proposed the solution to Spielberg and Kennedy.

"They came to me as I was preparing to do *Complete Unknown*, with Timmy [Chalamet], a story about the folk scene and [Bob] Dylan," recalls the man they turned to, James Mangold. "We were all getting hit by Covid at the time, and it looked like the Dylan film was not going to happen. And so they came to me, that trio. At first, I was a little startled." As it happened, Mangold and Ford had become buddies over the years, having lunches together, discussing roles (the director talked to the star about a part in *Ford V Ferrari*), working together on 2020's Mangold-produced man-and-dog film *The Call Of The*



Wild. And now, confronted by this most daunting of job offers, Mangold realised he knew what to do.

"It became really important to me to figure out how to make this a movie about a hero at sunset," he says. "The issues I brought up about Indy's age were not things I thought were being addressed in the material being developed at the time. There were old jokes, but the material itself wasn't about it. To me, whatever your greatest liability, you should fly straight towards that. If you try to pretend it's not there, you end up getting slings and arrows the whole way."

As with another James Mangold film, *Logan*, then, the new Indiana Jones movie will be all about its iconic hero ageing, grappling with his limits, wondering if there's anything left. A fact accentuated by everything around him. "No-one's ever felt older than being old in 1969," laughs Jez Butterworth, who, along with his brother John-Henry, wrote the screenplay with Mangold. "That's a really cruel time to be old. And that is what is so fun and playful about beginning the whole thing in the '40s — it makes it even more vertiginous when you suddenly cut to the future."

Because, yes, like *The Last Crusade* before it, this movie will take Indiana Jones forward by digging into his past.

There's nothing quite like an Indiana Jones prologue: essentially the ending of a spectacular blockbuster, casually unspooling before the *really* good stuff even begins. We've seen Indy dodging giant boulders, poisoned Champagne and a marauding rhino. Now, in a turbo-charged opening sequence, we will see Indy tangling with Nazis in a peril-packed castle. Except, the scene being set in 1944, it's Indy at 35 years old, with Ford playing the *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*-era adventurer via de-ageing tech.

"Now you can just put the character in a time-period you couldn't before. It's kind of amazing," marvels producer Frank Marshall. "My hope is that, although it will be talked about in terms of technology," adds Kathleen Kennedy, "you just watch it and go, 'Oh my God, they just found footage. This was a thing they shot 40 years ago.' We're dropping you into an adventure, something Indy is looking for, and instantly you have that feeling, 'I'm in an Indiana Jones movie.'"

Indy's original *Raiders* outfit, complete with stitched-up bullet hole in the left jacket sleeve, was borrowed from its final resting place at

Skywalker Ranch and tried on by Ford, so replicas could be made for the '44 sequence. To the astonishment of all, it fit perfectly. "I want his recipe book," laughs Marshall. "I think his proudest moment was when he fit in those pants." Says Mangold: "Harrison's as skinny and fit as he was in his thirties. He hasn't gained 30 lb. And we had a reserve of research materials — three movies of him to draw from and the original negative of all of them, shot from every angle — to pull and build the model from. I think the results are pretty startling."

Technology has moved on since De Niro and Pacino were aged down for *The Irishman* three years ago, with ILM building software that would sift through reams of footage of young Ford, finding as precise a match as possible for the new shots. Ford admits to being taken aback when he sat down to watch the prologue recently. "This is the first time I've seen it where I believe it. It's a little spooky. I don't think I even want to know how it works, but it works. Doesn't make me want to be young, though. I'm glad to have earned my age."

The whole pell-mell sequence ("From the bag on the head in the first scene, putting him in a tight spot is irresistible," grins Jez Butterworth) is designed to be vintage Indy,



Clockwise from

top left:
Still got it —
Indiana shows
the boat who's
boss; Ultra-
modern
government
agent Mason
(Shaunette
Renée Wilson);
Voller's "lapdog"
Kluber (Boyd
Holbrook);
Goddughter
and godfather
join forces.

a rip-roaring serial romp with the hero at full power. "I wanted the chance to dive into this kind of full-on George-and-Steven old picture and give the audience an adrenaline blast," says Mangold, who caught *Raiders* as a teenager at a mall in Middletown, New York. "And then we fall out, and you find yourself in 1969. So that the audience doesn't experience the change between the '40s and '60s as an intellectual conceit, but literally experiences the buccaneering spirit of those early days... and then the beginning of now."

Near the start of *Raiders*, as Henry Jones stood in a classroom explaining the Neolithic era ("I... T... H... I... C"), his pupils sat rapt. In 1969, he's still scrawling chalk across a board, but cuts a fustier figure. "In our lecture, all the women aren't going to be writing 'I love you' on their eyelids," says Mangold. "They're going to be blowing bubbles and looking out the window." The time-period, as Ford puts it, is "the water that the fish is out of. It is a time of pop culture. Of men on the moon. Music. Everything's changed. And not insignificantly, it is the end of his academic career, which leaves him open for other opportunities, or mischief."

Since marrying Marion Ravenwood, Indiana Jones has embraced — or tried to embrace — domesticity. He's initially reluctant, then, when that mischief arrives, in the form of Helena, played by Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

"She's a mystery and a wonder," enthuses the *Fleabag* star of her character, Indy's goddaughter. "Kathy was in London and asked to have dinner with me, and casually mentioned this. I immediately ordered ten bottles of wine. Then it was the fastest I've ever read a script; I came out of a sort of haze afterwards. I just couldn't believe how much fun I had and how moved I was by it. And then I had a Zoom and screamed, 'YES!' at them all."

Helena is not your average Indy sidekick. Mangold describes her as "slippery, charming, the girl next door, a grifter". Ford has a unique way of putting it: "She's a pioneer in ethical accounting." And John-Henry Butterworth says, "It's like those comedies from the '30s. Those Ben Hecht plays, where you get to write machine-gun dialogue for a character up against another character who's not giving an inch."

Mangold had a simple-but-not-simple note for Waller-Bridge: be Barbara Stanwyck. "I was like, 'Oh yeah, sure, I'll just do my Barbara Stanwyck.' IT'S AN IMPOSSIBLE FEAT!" laughs the actor. Specifically, she was pointed towards *The Lady Eve*, coincidentally a movie in which Stanwyck's con-artist character tangles with one of Indy's old foes: snakes.

Then, in a first for Waller-Bridge, she plunged into a shoot full of massive, frenetic action set-pieces, side by side with her indefatigable old-hand co-star. "Honestly, I just loved it," she beams. "When you're



playing a character who throws herself on the back of a vehicle, there's no acting around that. You just have to bloody do it." Perhaps a new career as a stuntperson beckons? "I mean, it would have to be in films requiring a very gawky, awkward stuntperson," she laughs.

Despite Indiana Jones being in his seventies, the action is as delirious as ever. Where *Crystal Skull* shot mostly in the US, this production hit the road to shoot in places as far-flung as Sicily, Morocco and, uh, Glasgow. "If anyone in early meetings brought it up, I'd say, 'No Volumes, please!'" says Mangold of rejecting the tech used by the likes of *The Mandalorian* to build worlds inside a studio. There are planes, trains, horses, trucks and — in a first for an Indy movie — helicopters. We will head to crypts, bazaars, even underwater (watch out for sea snakes!). "Every type of vehicle. Every country. We have scenes that are recreating really iconic, giant events," teases producer Simon Emanuel.

The hero's age, Mangold says, was not a concern: he's forever been a reluctant participant in mayhem. "Indy never saw a shortcut he wouldn't take, even when he was young and capable. He wasn't like The Rock. He'd always duck a punch or dive behind something or happily take good luck. I always

thought him a little like Bugs Bunny."

We ask Ford if that comparison was discussed on set. "No... no," the star grizzles. "And wait 'til I find the sonofabitch. I'll talk to him about that. Bugs Bunny..." Then, after a beat: "Yeah, and he was Elmer Fudd."

The new movie has yet another throwback. Because, even though it unravels over two decades after the end of World War II, the director of *Ford V Ferrari* is bringing us, once again, Ford V Nazis.

"Nazis? Where?" says the star on Zoom, looking over his shoulder in mock fear. There are rumours online of time-travel being part of the plot — and who knows what classified secrets await us? — but the reality is that former members of the Third Reich really were around in the US in the '60s, operating at the highest levels. "The simple fact is that the moon-landing programme was run by a bunch of ex-Nazis," says Jez Butterworth. "How 'ex' they are is the question. And it gets up Indy's nose... It's not just that the model of what a hero is has completely changed. It's not just that they're looking for something where there's nothing up

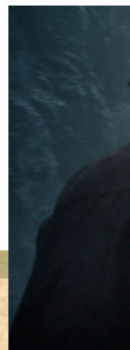
there — it's like Reno without the gambling, or whatever his line is. But the people that are behind it are, you know, his sworn enemies."

One of the inspirations for the film's big villain, Voller, was Wernher von Braun, Nazi aerospace engineer and co-creator of the V-2 missile; the Butterworths show *Empire* a photograph of von Braun next to JFK at Cape Canaveral. The writers used that jumping-off point to concoct a heady plot that weaves in and out of real American history; one major set-piece takes place at the New York parade thrown for the astronauts Ford once watched on TV.

"He's a man who would like to correct some of the mistakes of the past," says Mads Mikkelsen, who plays Voller. "There is something that could make the world a much better place to live in. He would love to get his hands on it. Indiana Jones wants to get his hands on it as well. And so, we have a story."

Also squaring off against Indy will be Klaber, played by Boyd Holbrook. "I'm a lapdog to Mads, and a crazy one at that," he says. "They've just found the cleverest way to continue the story and keep that integral villain."

Caught between the two sides is Shaunette Renée Wilson's Mason, an employee of a government agency who comes into Indy and



BURIED TREASURE

HE MAY HAVE BEEN OFF-GRID SINCE 2008, BUT AS THESE NODS PROVE, INDY WAS STILL ON HOLLYWOOD'S MIND



PADDINGTON (2014)

Indy's fedora is dear to him, hence him almost losing an arm snatching it back in a booby-trapped Peruvian temple. Peruvian talking bear Paddington loves his equally iconic red bucket hat too, and recreates the *Raiders* moment in his first outing, with a grating standing in for the big stone door.



RED NOTICE (2021)

Searching for a golden egg, treasure hunters Booth (Ryan Reynolds) and Hartley (Dwayne Johnson) discover Nazi artifacts. One crate is marked "Top Secret — Army Intel 9906753", the same number as was on the box containing the Ark Of The Covenant. Don't try to work out how this film connects to *Raiders* — it'll make your face melt off.



CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS (2022)

Chipmunk Chip's hat-and-leather-jacket get-up was inspired by Indiana Jones in the first place, back in 1989. So it's a very meta joke when, at a fan convention and hunting for hasty disguises, the duo stumble upon an Indy merch stall.



ANDOR (2022)

Intergalactic antiques dealer Luthen (Stellan Skarsgård) has a lot of cool stuff in his shop. But none cooler, or more inexplicable, than the bullwhip he has encased in carbonite, or the Sankara Stones, last seen in *Temple Of Doom*, now glimpsed on his shelves in Episode 4. Presumably worth a fortune (and glory).

Helena's orbit. "Think about during the '60s, when the CIA and FBI were recruiting more Black people to get involved with undercover work, with the Black Panthers and all that stuff," says the actor, who happens to have starred in Marvel's *Black Panther*. "And it's like, 'Who is this old guy running around, throwing things, jumping off stuff? What am I dealing with here?'"

At a time when people with Nazi leanings are once more in the headlines, one thing is for sure: it will be a joy to see Indiana Jones thwacking them again.

After hurtling around the globe (possibly via a tiny plane leaving a red line behind it on a map), contending with Covid and a traditional Harrison Ford injury (on *Temple Of Doom*, he put out his back riding an elephant; on this one, he tore a muscle throwing an air-punch), the shoot ended in February 2022. A wrap party, dubbed "The Last Brewsade", took place in Shoreditch. Then Mangold hunkered down to cut the film together.


One major ally has been Steven Spielberg, on hand frequently to offer tips. "Steven said to me, 'It's a movie that's a trailer from beginning to end — always be moving,'" Mangold recalls. Another has been legendary composer John Williams, whose score he has suggested might be his last ever, providing 'Indy 5' with, as Spielberg once put it to *Empire*, "120cc of pure Johnny Williams adrenaline". "I was very moved by his interpretation of the character," says Waller-Bridge of Williams' 'Helena's Theme', unveiled recently at a Hollywood Bowl concert. "I was expecting more of the darker shades, but the romance in that theme was so surprising and wonderful. When you hear a piece of music like that, you realise he's actually going to do a lot of the work for you."

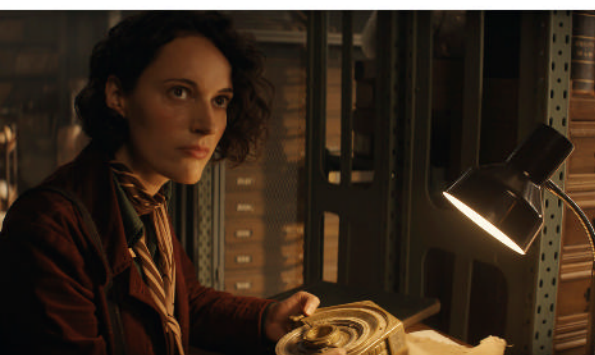
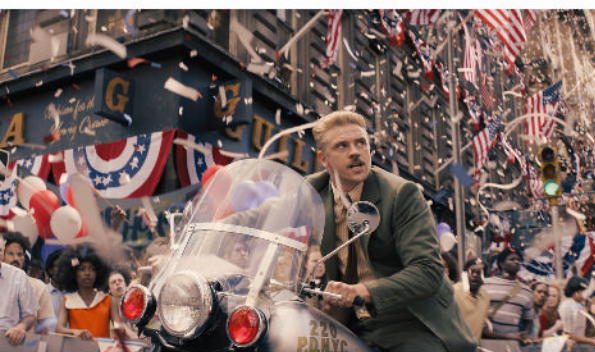
One final grand caper for a character we've all grown up with, the fifth Indiana Jones film will be the first released in the Marvel Age, where superheroes are rife. Is there still a place for a creaky archaeologist who winces when he's hit, and has no tech outside of his Ever Ready Space Beam torch? Its creators believe its throwback thrills are the very reason it'll connect. "Like *Top Gun: Maverick*, I think it'll have really broad appeal," says Simon Emanuel. "Good old-fashioned fights and whip-cracking."

As for Harrison Ford, the man who started it all way back in 1981, he pauses to think before he reflects on the experience in an interview for the very first time. "It's full of adventure, full of laughs, full of real emotion. And it's complex and it's sneaky," he says. "The shooting of it was tough and long and arduous. But I'm very happy with the film that we have."

Whatever the odds, whatever the years, whatever the mileage, a true hero always shoots for the moon. Or whips for it. 🐍

THE FIFTH INDIANA JONES FILM WILL BE IN CINEMAS FROM 30 JUNE 2023


Clockwise from left: Let's hope there are no snakes; Klüber crashes a parade; Helena at work; Indy and Basil (Toby Jones) face down a shadowy foe.



2023 PREVIEW

NEXT YEAR BRINGS US SUPERHEROES, HITMEN AND, WELL, PEOPLE MADE OF WATER. HERE'S OUR LOWDOWN ON THE MOVIES WE CAN'T WAIT TO GAWP AT

SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE

HOW DO YOU go about making a sequel to one of the greatest superhero films? The answer: you double down. 2018's *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* matched game-changing animation with a bold story following Miles Morales, an Afro-Latino kid who learns how to be Spider-Man when he's bestowed with powers. A sequel was inevitable — but producers Phil Lord and Chris Miller had bigger plans than that, because with great power comes... the power to make *two* sequels. Indeed, Miles' next story has been split in half, beginning with *Across the Spider-Verse* — a movie which, Lord and Miller tell us, is even more pioneering than the original...

Why make this a two-part story?

Lord: I guess we're gonna get asked this a lot, Chris! You're gonna get a raw answer. The story started to get pretty big. And we had a unique opportunity with a really supportive studio to tell a really grand, epic story in animation. There are not that many chances to do that. I think it's made the two films into more surprising movies.

Miller: When we realised that each one could stand alone on its own and you could dig into the emotional depths that we wanted to instead of just breezing past it to get through the plot, that felt like it was the right decision. So we were able to tell this story completely. And, you know, bladders only last so long.

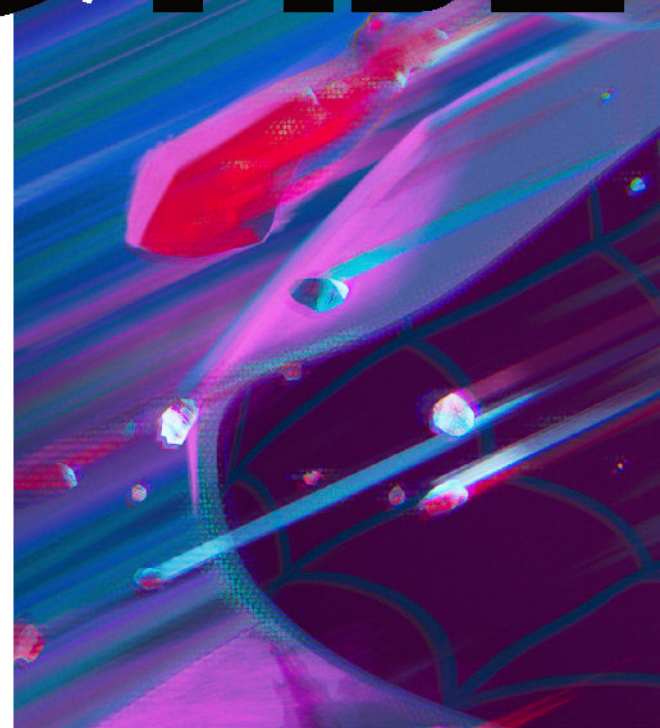
Where do we find Miles in this film?

Miller: Miles is going through different phases in his life. Now he's got confidence, but he's starting to find out where his place in the world is, and he's feeling ready for his next challenges. He wants to leave the nest. He has to figure out who he is and who in his life matters, and what's important. As a teenager those are a lot of the big questions that you're asking yourself, and this is playing it out on a big, multi-dimensional superhero scale.

Is Spider-Gwen on her own journey, too?

Miller: She sure is. The movie opens in Gwen's world, and she has a lot of things going on. There's a lot of her world in this movie.

Lord: There's tension between the romantic possibilities for her and Miles, and their desire to keep their friendship intact, and not to risk it. That's a really interesting place for



Above: Spider-Gwen in action. **Here:** Miles Morales (Shameik Moore) "wants to leave the nest," according to producer Chris Miller.



OUT
2
JUNE

REVERSE

CAN RETURNING HEROES MILES MORALES
AND SPIDER-GWEN CHANGE CINEMA ALL
OVER AGAIN? THAT'S THE PLAN



two characters to be, especially when they're so young.

The first film's animation style was groundbreaking. How are you pushing that forward?

Lord: The first film had one animation style that dominates the movie. This movie has six [laughs]. So we're taking those tools, adding all the things we learned on *The Mitchells Vs The Machines*, and then growing them further to accommodate the ambition of this movie. Which is to wow you every time you enter a new environment, and also to make sure that the style of the movie reflects the story, and that the images are driven by feelings, as opposed to some egg-headed art project. Which it also is, by the way!

Are you able to get into any specifics on some of the different worlds we go to?

Miller: Well, the two that you saw in the teaser trailer were what's called Earth-50101, which we're calling 'Mumbattan' — that's based on an

Indian comic-book look — and Nueva York from Spider-Man 2099's world. That's based on Syd Mead-style illustrations of what the future might look like. There's also Gwen's world, which is Earth-65. And that has a watercolour-wash style that's reminiscent of the covers of her comic books.

How does Spider-Man 2099, who was teased in the first film, fit into all of this?

Lord: Miguel O'Hara is the leader of a band of fighters that are trying to clean up the consequences of the collider explosion at the end of the first movie. And as you can imagine, it's really hard to lead a bunch of people who have never been led [laughs].

Finally, you've mentioned before that, this being the multiverse, you could theoretically bring in Tom Holland. Now the multiverse is fully open, how close do you think that is to becoming a reality?

Miller: [Laughs] Let's say... Anything is possible in the multiverse. **AMON WARMANN**

TAIKA WAITITI TELLS US WHY HE WANTED TO MAKE A FILM ABOUT THE WORLD'S WORST FOOTBALL TEAM

OUT
21
APRIL

NEXT GOAL WINS

IN 2001, THE American Samoa football team lost 31-0 against Australia. They were an awful team, comprised of an eclectic gang of misfits, with little idea of how to successfully play the game. Then charismatic Dutch football coach Thomas Rongen was drafted in to attempt to turn their fortunes around. All of this was chronicled in 2014's joyful documentary *Next Goal Wins*, which has now been dramatised by Taika Waititi — and the results sound very Taika Waititi...

What made you want to make this film?

It was the ultimate underdog story. It taking place in Polynesia is very important to me, because it's my people. We stick together. It was like seeing myself up there, seeing my family up there, when I saw that documentary, which is so perfect in many ways. And to have a broader audience have access to that story was one of my main goals. To bring our backyard to people, and to put brown faces on screen was a big deal for me. I just loved it. It was a great antidote to doing *Thor* and *Jojo Rabbit*. Not that there's anything negative about doing those other films, but I just missed home so much.

Where have you taken the story?

Yeah, well, if you love films that are really authentic to the true stories, then you're gonna hate this movie. I mean, just watch the

documentary if you want to see exactly what happened. We go a bit deeper with these characters. The way that everything unfolded is the same. I don't know what kind of car Thomas [Rongen] drove when he was on the island, but I gave him a Toyota [laughs].

Thomas is really charismatic. What was your take on him?

The main thing is, it's a man who keeps saying that he's a winner and calls everyone else losers — it's about the biggest loser in the world finding a family, with a team of other losers [laughs].

One way you're absolutely honouring the reality is by casting a non-binary character to play a real-life non-binary player.

That's obviously very important. Kaimana plays the part of Jaiyah [Saelua]. It's very hard to find a) a non-binary actor, and b) someone who's also Samoan. And who can also play football! And who can act! I mean, that pool was very small. So to be able to find someone, it was amazing. She's incredible, she really carries it.

The documentary is hugely human — it works even if you don't care about football. Presumably your film follows suit, for anyone with zero interest in the game.

Yeah, they can take heart in the fact that it's made by someone who knew nothing about



Top: Michael Fassbender brings Dutch courage as coach Thomas Rongen. Above: Kaimana as Jaiyah Saelua.

football and finished the filming process knowing even less. I still don't know the rules, I don't know what the hell's going on. It's about the people and the characters. What's really great, though, is the way that we show football. We managed to make the worst team in the world look extremely exciting.

What was it like making it?

We threw it together pretty quick. And that's the way that I like making films. It harks back to the way that I was making films before *Thor*. Small films with my friends, everyone pitching in and getting it done, and focusing on the story. Rather than spectacle and ridiculous effects.

ALEX GODFREY

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

HONOUR

AMONG

THIEVES



OUT
3
APRIL

PREPARE YOURSELF FOR SOME NOT-SO-SERIOUS ROLE-PLAYING

JOHN FRANCIS DALEY and Jonathan Goldstein would like to share a secret about their upcoming movie, *Dungeons & Dragons*. "We have no dragons or dungeons," reveals Goldstein. "Yeah," adds Daley. "We're just trolling our audience!"

They're joking, of course. And, as the writer-director duo behind *Vacation* and *Game Night*, this is hardly the first time. Which begs the question: how have two comedy guys wound up doing an epic fantasy adventure featuring more magic and monsters than you can wave a wand at? "It all starts with character," replies Goldstein. "It doesn't matter what genre it is. What makes the audience care is, 'Who are we following and why should we invest in them?' That's always been our approach, regardless of the size and scale."

The characters in question here are a gang of not-too-proficient thieves (Chris Pine, Michelle Rodriguez, Justice Smith and Sophia Lillis), whose unwise actions endanger their entire world. So they somewhat reluctantly attempt to set that right. And, being Daley/Goldstein characters, they bring more laughs than you might expect from a genre that usually plays straight. "I want to hang out with the characters we create," says Daley. "And

I wouldn't want to hang out with someone that takes things too seriously."

Besides, "that is true to the spirit of the game [on which the film is based]," points out producer Jeremy Latcham, who previously worked with the pair as screenwriters on *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. "D&D is a group of people around the table, taking the piss out of each other at times, but not taking the piss out of the game itself."

So, expect plenty of gags — for example about why the Speak With Dead spell specifically only allows you to ask five questions of your reanimated corpse. "To us that's very funny," says Goldstein. "Like, who makes these rules? We can't just shut off that part of our brain that questions things, so we question all the givens of the fantasy genre. That's part of the fun of making a movie like this!"

It's all about busting clichés, the pair explain. "It was very much incumbent on us to reinvent the genre in some ways," says Goldstein. The result, promises Latcham, is a movie that will be "a real discovery for people. It's so different than what they'll expect it to be." Although, we can confirm there *will* be dragons. And maybe a dungeon or two. **DAN JOLIN**



OUT
14
APRIL

RENFIELD

Nicolas Cage wants to suck your blood...

ILLUSTRATION BY RAJ DHUNNA

There are a *lot* of Dracula movies. Among his many achievements, Bram Stoker's vampire still holds the Guinness World Record for "Most Portrayed Character In Horror Films". But in that vast, decades-long canon, there has never been a film that centres on the Count's long-suffering familiar, Renfield. Until *Renfield*.

"We're doing something different," says director Chris McKay. "It's going far away from what you would typically think of a Dracula movie: it's modern, and it's through the lens of Dracula as a shitty boss." (The premise came from *The Walking Dead* creator Robert Kirkman, who pitched it as part of the ongoing 'Universal Monsters' revamp.)

While it's a funny concept, McKay says it's "not a straight-up comedy". It straddles tones: scares, laughs, the lot. "There is definitely a tongue-in-cheek premise — what if your boss was literally the boss from hell? — but it's also got action, it's got a lot of heart, it's not without menace..." McKay lists *What We Do In The Shadows*, *An American Werewolf In London*, *Shaun Of The Dead* and *Evil Dead II* as his touchpoints.

Two Nicks will be bringing this fresh take to an old bloodsucker. Renfield himself will be played by Nicholas Hoult (who has done "a lot of fight training" for the role, McKay says); while Nicolas Cage takes on Dracula, fulfilling the prophecy he foretold way back in 1988's *Vampire's Kiss*, in which he repeatedly bellowed: "I'm a vampire!" "That's his brand," chuckles McKay of Cage. "He refers to himself as the 'California Kinski'" — a nod to German actor Klaus Kinski, who played *Nosferatu* in 1979.

In fact, there are Cage-ian homages to multiple Draculas in the film, from Kinski to Christopher Lee to Bela Lugosi to Max Schreck, and even non-Dracula influences. "We talked a lot about silent acting," McKay says. "Things like *The Cabinet Of Dr. Caligari*, making shapes with his body. You're gonna see allusions to *Nosferatu*, all the way to Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate*." Exactly how a seductive older woman from a 1960s romantic comedy in any way relates to the immortal Transylvanian noble, only time will tell. **JOHN NUGENT**

Above:

The adventuring party encounter, appropriately enough, a tabletop. Right: One of the film's big sequences takes place in a magic-maze arena.



LUTHER

OUT
MARCH

IDRIS ELBA'S ICONIC COP RETURNS -
AND HE'S GOING TO THE MOVIES

IDRIS ELBA DOESN'T feel the need to play James Bond. For years, fans have been hoping he might step into 007's shoes, but Elba already has a character of Bond-esque potential, he says. And he's soon to star in a film that could compete with the 007 series in terms of thrills, villains and intrigue. "Not to be controversial, but this is probably the best forum to say it — all the talk about Bond is fantastic, but *this* is my version of that," he says. "I've got a character and a landscape here in which I can do exactly what people love from Bond and Bourne and all those other big franchises." He's talking about Detective John Luther, the rogue cop he's portrayed in the BBC crime series of the same name since 2010, now making his long-awaited movie debut, via Netflix. Here's why Elba is so excited...

IT SHOWS A NEW SIDE OF THE CHARACTER

A movie adaptation of *Luther* was first reported as being in the works in 2011. Eleven years and five seasons of John chasing psychopaths (and his own sanity) around east London underpasses later, it's finally here, picking up where Season 5's shocking finale left off. "The last time we saw him, John was caught doing things he couldn't help himself doing and he's had to go to jail for it," says Elba. "And in that solace, there's been a renewal of who he is." When we're reacquainted with John, it's a more contemplative version of the character than we've seen before. Don't expect that state of zen to last long, though, because...

IT FEATURES LUTHER'S MOST TWISTED BADGIE TO DATE

"His character's like a chameleon. He's able to take advantage of people because they can't see him coming," Elba reveals of the film's antagonist, played by Andy Serkis and described as "incredibly modern, and weird and dark". Plot details are still under wraps, with questions

about how Luther might re-enter the fold at London's Serious Crime Unit with a criminal record to his name left for now unanswered. But what Elba does promise is that this villain shakes up Luther's life in a serious way.

IT STAYS TRUE TO THE SHOW'S DNA

For Elba and creator Neil Cross — "John's parents," the actor jokes — there were potential mistakes they wanted to avoid in the transition from small screen to a larger canvas. "It's really dangerous when expanding from television to film to throw a lot of money at it, and for that money to change the characteristics of the show," he explains. "I wanted to make sure that even though we had a bigger budget, [we didn't] distort the parameters of Luther-land too much. We do amplify the action and do amplify the stakes. But the man-under-the-bed moment?" he says, referencing a notorious scene from the show's Season 3 opener. "That don't cost you much money. Those moments are still intact."

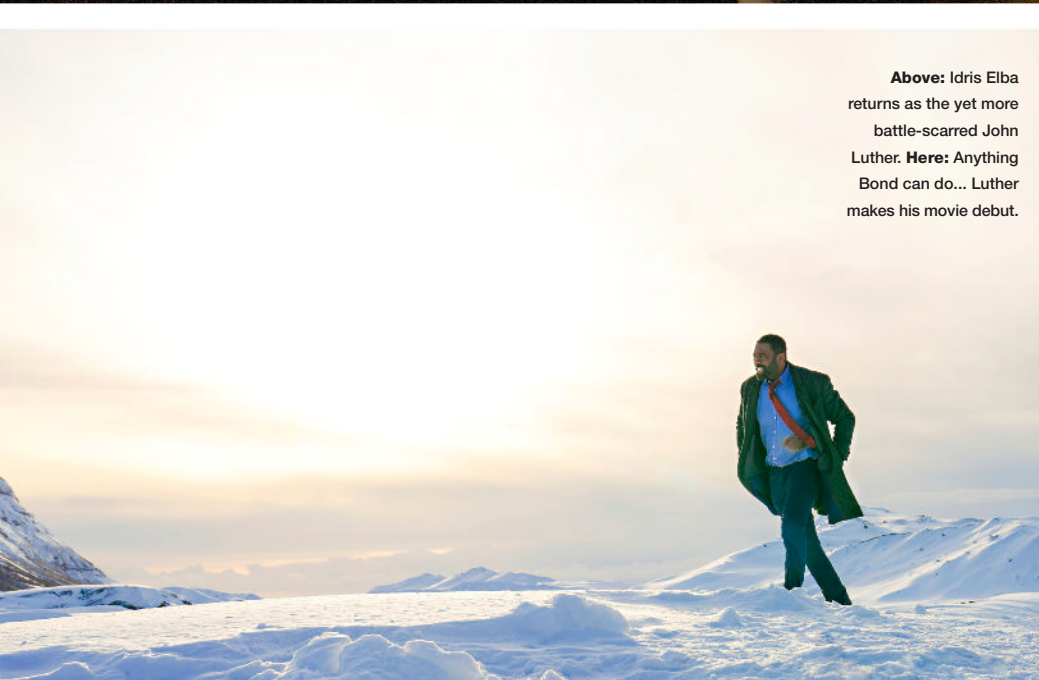
IT EXPANDS LUTHER'S WORLD

Elba says the movie-length runtime allows more exploration of who Luther is and what makes him tick. "We really peel the onion back here because we had the time and scale to do that," he explains. "It also gives Neil [Cross] a lot more, you know, Luther-land to play with, in terms of where Luther can go, how he goes, what the landscape is. We break out of the gritty streets of London, we take it outside of that a little bit. And that's great. It feels like now we're entering a different life of the Luther experience." However, just because its new Netflix home means Luther will reach a more international audience than ever, the film doesn't compromise his east London idiosyncrasies. Luther will still, promises Elba, "say things like, 'I couldn't give a monkey's.' I don't even know where that comes from, but it's the way Luther speaks!" The big-screen bow of a character that Idris Elba wants to make as big as James Bond? That's definitely worth giving a monkey's about. **AL HORNER**





Above: Idris Elba returns as the yet more battle-scarred John Luther. **Here:** Anything Bond can do... Luther makes his movie debut.



MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE DEAD RECKONING PART ONE

Strap in for the saga's most epic adventure yet
ILLUSTRATION BY RAJ DHUNNA

The first thing you should know about *Mission: Impossible — Dead Reckoning Part One* is that it's finished filming. Finally. "Today was the last day of principal photography on *Mission: Impossible 7*," smiles writer-director Christopher McQuarrie as he catches up with *Empire* on Zoom. It's 29 October 2022 when we speak. Shooting began just over two years earlier, when Tom Cruise rode a motorbike off a cliff. Since then, McQuarrie's had to juggle both pandemic interruptions and filming on *Part Two*, but now he's been able to finish what he started. "It seems as though the movie, singular, has been shooting forever, but in fact the movies, plural, have been shooting forever," he laughs.

The second thing you should know is that — with Ethan Hunt's return still some way off — McQuarrie is keeping mum on plot details for now. Suffice it to say that, "There are many things emerging from Ethan's past. 'Dead reckoning' is a navigational term. It means you're picking a course based solely on your last known position and that becomes quite the metaphor not only for Ethan, but several characters."

He does, though, promise "a more emotionally charged movie, rather than a plot-charged action movie". Which is not to say that the Cruise/McQuarrie team that brought you such favourites as *Clinging To A Plane*, *Falling Out Of Another Plane* and *Going To The Toilet With Henry Cavill* will skimp on the adrenaline rushes. There's a breakneck car chase through Rome featuring a Fiat 500 ("I would not choose to get in that car again," laughs McQuarrie. "It's much scarier than flying over a glacier in New Zealand in a helicopter"); the aforementioned, and frankly insane, motorcycle/parachute jump; an intense foot chase and fight sequence through the streets of Venice; a major fight on top of a moving train; and a desert-set sequence which McQuarrie has wanted to do forever. "The first thing we knew was that if it's gonna be a big two-part adventure, it's got to be epic," he says. "It's going to have to be the instalment that swallows the rest of the franchise whole. There's just not another way to do it." We're gonna need a bigger fuse. **CHRIS HEWITT**

CHAPTER

OUT
24
MARCH

BABA YAGA IS BACK! AND THIS TIME, DIRECTOR CHAD STAHELSKI TELLS US, HE *REALLY* HAS HIS WORK CUT OUT FOR HIM...

PART FOURS ARE notoriously difficult to nail. For every *Avengers: Endgame* (farewell, Tony), there's a *Police Academy 4: Citizens On Patrol* (farewell, Mahoney). This is something Chad Stahelski was keenly aware of while figuring out where to take John Wick fourth time around.

"It gets a little scary after the third one," says Stahelski, who has directed all four *Wicks*. "Because now we have a formula that works. But you have to throw caution to the wind and say, 'Fuck it, we're not doing that again.' So now, on number four, we have multiple storylines. The movie feels different. It feels more epic."

The last time we saw John, at the end of *John Wick: Chapter 3 — Parabellum*, he was not in a fit state for an epic. In fact, he was as close to death as he's ever been (which is saying something). Betrayed by his old mucker Winston (Ian McShane), shot several times at point-blank range, and then pancaked on the pavement after a dive off the roof of the iconic Continental hotel, Keanu Reeves' one-man-army was a quivering mess of broken bones and blood. So this one doesn't quite pick up right away. "A little time has passed between three and four," explains Stahelski. "Enough for John to stitch some bones back together and heal."

Wick, then, is waging war, and there's "only one way out," says Stahelski. "John doesn't know when to quit." But into the mix comes a new assortment of threats, each presumably with fairly low life-expectancies. "I don't think we have one antagonist in this film, we have many," laughs the director. "We've given the High Table [the mysterious organisation that controls the murky criminal underworld in which Wick operates] a little more of a face."

So there's Shamier Anderson as a character called Tracker ("name says what that's all about"), and there's Hiroyuki Sanada as an old friend of John's. Then there's Scott Adkins ("Yes, he can kick and punch, but when you see his performance in this, you're gonna realise, 'Oh my God, this guy can hold his own'"), Bill Skarsgård, Chilean martial artist and part-time man-mountain Marko Zaror, and possibly the greatest action star to grace the franchise yet: the legendary Donnie Yen. "Donnie spent all his time thinking about the character creation," says Stahelski. "And you put all these guys together, and John becomes the nexus of how they all meet."

But it'll be less a case of meet-cute, more meet-shoot. Stahelski may be fiddling with the



The man in black is back to paint the town red. By killing lots of people.

SHAZAM!

OUT
17
MARCH



FURY
OF THE
GODS

THE SUPER-MAN-CHILD RETURNS — AND SOME GODDESSES AREN'T HAPPY ABOUT IT

2019'S *SHAZAM!* WAS a cheery, family-friendly movie with a classic wish-fulfilment hook: what if a lonely kid could become a superhero with a single word? Despite critical and commercial success, though, director David F. Sandberg had a nagging feeling about it; he'd run out of time to tweak some things, and had more ideas he wanted to try. So, returning for the sequel, he decided to create gods and monsters unlike any the DC Universe has seen — because they don't come from the comics at all.

"We landed there because Shazam's powers come from Greek gods," explains Sandberg of the new villains. "So what if those powers were stolen from the gods and now they want revenge?" He and his team created the three Daughters of Atlas, bringing the titular fury at the theft of their birthright. Zachary Levi's Shazam, aka foster kid Billy Batson (Asher Angel), and his newfound foster family will face off against a formidable clan of goddesses.

To play Hespera, one of the biggest of the bads, Sandberg had a wishlist that started with Helen Mirren — and ended there, as she signed up. "She wanted to do all her own stunts," he says. "We had to tell her sometimes, 'We need an

Above: Helen Mirren and Lucy Liu bring a bit of divine retribution. **Below:** Shazam (Zachary Levi), with his new superfriends.

actual stuntperson to do that.'" As he prepared to dangle a Dame from wires, two more top choices followed in Lucy Liu and *West Side Story*'s Rachel Zegler as Kalypso and Anthea, and the trio kicked the action into a higher gear than the first film's mall-fight or Christmas-fair confrontation. "It was fun destroying things," grins Sandberg of the shoot. "We wrecked so many cars, dropped them from the sky. There's one scene where we have cars flying up in the air and smashing into each other; we didn't even put it all in the movie, because it was a lot of cars."

However, it was in creating the monsters of the "god realm" that horror-lover Sandberg could really indulge himself. "We have this dragon that's sort of made of wood and emanates a fear effect, and a tree of life, a minotaur, a manicore... It was really cool diving into mythology, rather than comic books." With a harpie head sitting in his office, he seems happy. **HELEN O'HARA**

format a little bit, but at the end of the day, a *John Wick* movie will always live and die by its dying. And there will be a lot of dying here, with John travelling to France, Jordan and Tokyo, and finding new ways to kill people, many of which are drawn from the globe-trotting, well-read Stahelski's own world. "I travel a lot," he says. "I'm in Paris scouting, and see the Arc de Triomphe and I'm like, 'Okay, I got an idea.' So I put it in the movie. I've got some cowboy friends in the stunt community, so I think, 'That would be a cool horse gag.' Two of the big sequences were last-minute inspirations that I've always wanted to try but just didn't know how to do."

For now, Stahelski is keeping schtum about just what those sequences are ("One's really cool, the other's super-cool," he laughs), but he is willing to give a rough idea of the madness that awaits us. "If you took *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly*, crossed it with *Zatoichi*, and threw in a Greek myth, you'd probably get something close to this," he smiles. "And who else fucking says those kinds of sentences? Now you know why I like doing *John Wicks*." Well, one thing's for sure: they didn't do that in *Police Academy 4: Citizens On Patrol*. **CHRIS HEWITT**



CR

OUT
3
MARCH

2023
PREVIEW

FEED

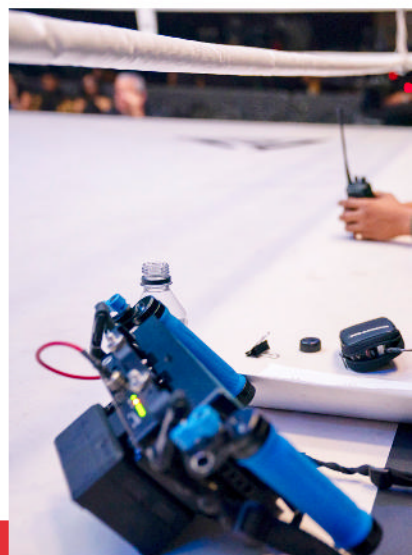
WITH THE THIRD
INSTALMENT OF THE
BOXING SAGA, STAR
MICHAEL B. JORDAN
HAS STEPPED UP
TO DIRECT. AND, HE
SAYS, HE'S PULLED
NO PUNCHES

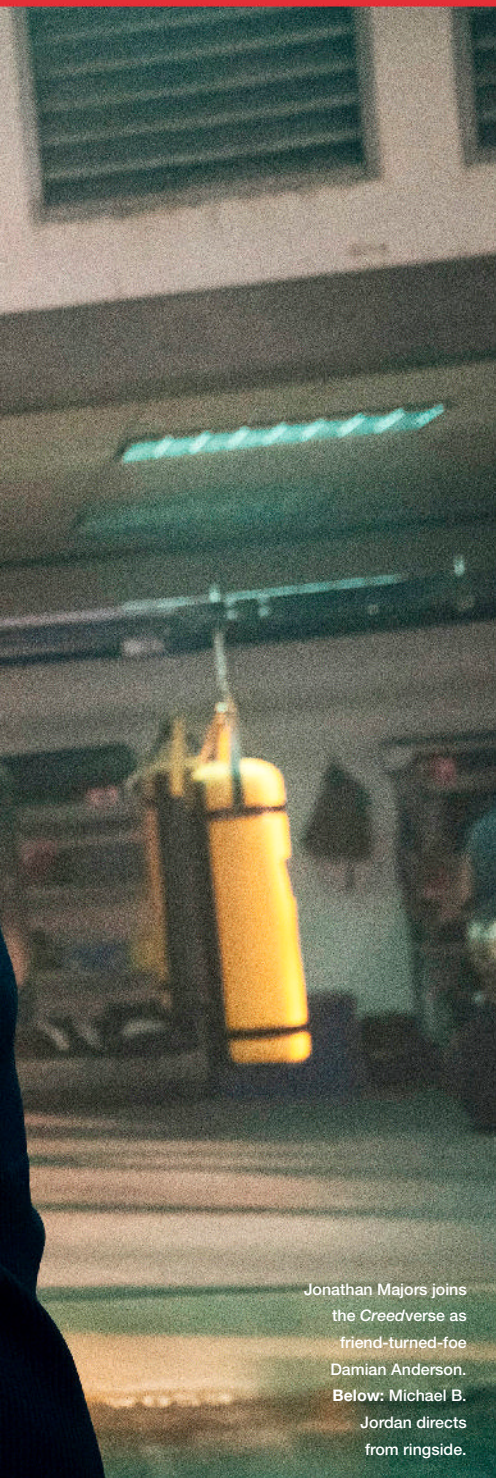


SINCE 2015, THE walloping grit of the *Creed* franchise has been a worthy successor to the *Rocky* legend, following the late Apollo Creed's plucky son Adonis into heavyweight glory under the watchful eye of Sylvester Stallone's ageing pug. After starring in both previous films, Michael B. Jordan gets into the director's chair for *Creed III*, which promises a highly personal war of attrition between Creed and his ex-convict childhood pal Damian, played by Jonathan Majors. We asked Jordan how he's pushed things forward.

What's it been like to direct yourself?

I was pretty anxious going into it, wondering what that would be like. "Who's calling action and cut? Is that me?!" Talking with Denzel [Washington] and Bradley Cooper and others





Jonathan Majors joins the *Creed*verse as friend-turned-foe Damian Anderson. Below: Michael B. Jordan directs from ringside.



who have directed themselves, they told me you have to find your groove and your pace with your first AD and actors. But it's also like having a superpower: within your performance, you can also direct. It saves some time in some areas, because you get a chance to self-correct in the moment. So that's a liberating experience to have. It became fun after a while.

Tell us about casting Jonathan Majors as Adonis' friend-turned-antagonist.

I'm lucky to have my casting director, Alexa Fogel, who I've known since she cast me on *The Wire* 20 years ago. I always told her that when I was going to direct, she would cast my film. She is someone who's invested in me. So I told her I was looking at Jonathan, and she said, "That's amazing," and I kind of cold-called him. We hit it off right off the bat.

How does his character measure up against other famous *Rocky* or *Creed* antagonists, like Clubber Lang or Ivan Drago?

I think he has an intensity and a realness of character we haven't seen before. He's a grounded character who's antagonistic by nature, but it comes from an honest place, real emotions. He's not a moustache-twirling villain; I wanted people to understand him, and to make it hard for people. I think those make for the most complicated and interesting ones to watch.

It's amazing that you have one of the pound-for-pound greatest fighters on Earth, Canelo Álvarez, in what looks like a cameo. How did that happen?

One of the great things about the *Creed* franchise is that we actually have real boxers. It kind of blends the film's world with reality. He was a big fan of mine and the movies, so it just kind of worked out. We have a couple other notable fighters in the movie too. But I'm keeping them a secret for now!

Has playing Adonis turned you into a big boxing fan?

My dad and I used to watch boxing, growing up. That's where I got a love for the old Mike Tyson fights, and seeing Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis. I started to watch documentaries about the sport and how it came to be. So it's about paying homage to the sport and to the warriors out there; it's important to tell a truthful story of the way they experience things. Not just the glamorous side, but the beautiful, violent ballet that is boxing. And what does it do to families, what are the hardships?

This is the first *Creed* film without Rocky. How did you write around his absence? And does that absence free you up, as a director and actor, to have *Creed III* stand on its own two feet?

It's really diving into the *Creed* universe and having him evolve, start his own family and go through his own trials and tribulations in life. It's allowed Adonis to stand on his own two feet and use the wisdom he's learned from Rocky in the other two films. I think it's in the spirit of Rocky, whose fingerprints will always and forever be on this franchise. The essence of him is still there. But at the same time, the *Creed* franchise is moving in a strong direction. **CHRISTINA NEWLAND**



IT
11
AUGUST

HAUNTED MANSION

This theme-park-ride adaptation wants to scare you silly ILLUSTRATION BY RAJ DHUNNA

"We have people hanging from rafters, flying around, jumping off things... alligators! It's childhood-dream stuff, really." Director Justin Simien is talking *Empire* through a particularly batshit-sounding sequence in his particularly batshit-sounding new movie. Based on the spooky Disneyland ride of the same name, *Haunted Mansion* looks to blend supernatural comedy with action set-pieces and horror that "really packs a punch," chuckles Simien. "It's a family adventure, but when it gets scary, it gets scary."

If this all sounds wilder than expected, then that was very much the intention. "The ride itself has this subversive undertone," says Simien, who worked at Disneyland as a teen, spending lunchbreaks in the Haunted Mansion. "It speaks to all generations simultaneously and weaves different mysteries together like gossamer. That's the tone we wanted for the movie."

The ride has been adapted for screen before, with the 2003 Eddie Murphy offering of the same name. "Ours is a very different film," says Simien. "A fresh start for the franchise." The plot centres on single mother Gabbie (Rosario Dawson), who moves into a rundown New Orleans manor to discover it teeming with eccentric phantoms, and drafts in a squad of "ghost fanatics", including Owen Wilson's priest, Tiffany Haddish's medium, LaKeith Stanfield's paranormal expert and Danny DeVito's spectre-obsessed academic, to deal with the ghouls. And then there's a performance-captured Jared Leto, being "weird, creepy [and] funny" as the villainous Hatbox Ghost.

To get this impressive ensemble into the "woo-woo headspace", Simien gave each actor their own crystal, to "bring clarity, amplify energy... Just tune into [paranormal] thinking, so it felt authentic on screen." Further ventures into the offbeat occurred throughout, not least in the aforementioned batshit scene. "That takes place in the 'Stretching Room'," teases Simien. "The walls stretch and you can't tell if you're going up or down... It's a *nuts* sequence." Ghosts, monsters and M.C. Escher-inspired architecture: this might be Disney's weirdest swing yet. **TOM ELLEN**


 OUT
16
JUNE


PIXAR'S LATEST TRADES ON SOME PROPER CHEMISTRY

THE IDEA FOR Peter Sohn's *Elemental* began with the absolute basics. Literally. "In school, when I was learning the periodic table, I never saw it as a table," the director recalls. "I saw it as apartments lined up. There was copper living next to cobalt... They all became families."

That memory came back to him about five years ago, when he was trying to develop a movie based on his own family. Sohn was raised in New York by Korean immigrant parents and felt a pull between two cultures, especially when he found the woman he wanted to marry. "Growing up, my family said, 'You've got to marry Korean.' Then I fell in love with someone who wasn't Korean. That triggered a *Romeo And Juliet*-style story. A culture clash. A romance that could never be, which led to the question of, 'What if fire fell in love with water?'"

Those thoughts grew into *Elemental*, set in a city where every inhabitant is an element. Not those from the periodic table — "I couldn't make fun of boron or the noble gases" — but your classic fire, water, wind, earth. They all live in Element City, but there is little mixing. Communities keep to themselves. The story





He's made of water!
She's made of fire!
Things are gonna get
steamy. Below: Concept
art of *Elemental*'s
star-crossed lovers.

centres on a fire woman, Ember (voiced by Leah Lewis), who's "hot-tempered, loyal, fiercely traditional". Ember works in a shop run by her immigrant parents and expects to emulate their life. Then there's the watery Wade (Mamoudou Athie), whose life is much more fluid. His ancestors built Element City and he feels unrestricted, free, in a way that Ember doesn't. Wade seems like he flows easily through life, although Sohn calls him "surprisingly deep, even though he looks shallow". These two, who don't believe their worlds can mix, accidentally crash together, and unexpected romance starts to simmer.

Sohn could not have imagined quite how difficult this story would be to tell. Aside from the technical challenge of animating so much fire, water and wind, which Sohn calls "one of the most challenging things to date at Pixar", it turns out anthropomorphising elements is tricky. "We started out with realistic fire and it was terrifying!" says Sohn. "Then we tried a super-caricatured version and it became too flat."

After much development, they think they've cracked it all. They're hoping they've settled on something with warmth, but which won't have anyone reaching for the fire extinguisher.

OLLY RICHARDS

ALSO *www* SHOWING



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2
3

2023: IT'S GONNA BE A BEAST. HERE'S THE REST OF WHAT'S REVVING US UP *www*

Kicking off with a big one: Steven Spielberg's semi- (read: hugely) autobiographical coming-of-age drama **THE FABELMANS** (27 JANUARY), which might break your heart (spoiler: we've seen it, it will)... Darren Aronofsky brings us a psychologically fragile Brendan Fraser in **THE WHALE** (3 FEBRUARY)... Elizabeth Banks' **COCAINE BEAR** (24 FEBRUARY) brings us, well, a bear on cocaine... James Gunn reassembles his ragtag band of maniacs for **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 3** (5 MAY)... Halle Bailey stars, sings and swims in Rob Marshall's live-action take on **THE LITTLE MERMAID** (26 MAY)... Greta Gerwig co-writes (with Noah Baumbach) and directs the DayGlo **BARBIE** (21 JULY), starring Margot Robbie and Ryan Gosling — the mind boggles... Christopher Nolan knows the codes for atomic-bomb biopic **OPPENHEIMER** (21 JULY)... Brie Larson's Captain Marvel, Iman Vellani's Ms. Marvel and Teyonah Parris' Monica Rambeau team up for Nia DaCosta's **THE MARVELS** (28 JULY)... Ben Wheatley — yes, really — directs Jason Statham in shark sequel **THE MEG 2: THE TRENCH** (4 AUGUST)... Aaron Taylor-Johnson and his muscles — and moustache — star in J.C. Chandor's Spider-Man-adjacent **KRAVEN THE HUNTER** (6 OCTOBER)... Denis Villeneuve returns with, no doubt, more epic world-building beauty in **DUNE: PART TWO** (3 NOVEMBER)... Just in time for Christmas, we'll all get golden tickets for Paul King's **WONKA** (15 DECEMBER), which introduces us to the chocolatier as a younger man (namely, Timothée Chalamet)... And just in time for New Year's Eve, the biggest, or at least most watery, party of all: James Wan's **AQUAMAN AND THE LOST KINGDOM** (26 DECEMBER). If they don't bring back the octopus drummer, we riot.

But wait! There's more. Currently without release dates, a plethora of films so tantalising they transcend the mere notion of 'dates'. Yorgos Lanthimos' **POOR THINGS**, in which his *The Favourite* star Emma Stone plays a woman who swaps her brain with that of her unborn child, as you do... David Fincher's noir thriller **THE KILLER**

Above: Margot Robbie as living doll Barbie. **Below:** New Little Mermaid Halle Bailey, down where it's wetter; Cillian Murphy drops a bomb as Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer*.

reunites him with *Seven* writer Andrew Kevin Walker, and stars Michael Fassbender and Tilda Swinton... Tom Hardy plays a detective in Gareth Evans' presumably bone-crunching **HAVOC**... Emerald Fennell follows up her scorching *Promising Young Woman* with **SALT BURN**, led by Rosamund Pike... Eddie Murphy's potty-mouthed cop returns in **BEVERLY HILLS COP: AXEL FOLEY**... Martin Scorsese gets his two muses together, as Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio face off in **KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON**... Joaquin Phoenix rules in Ridley Scott's **NAPOLÉON**, as well as heading up Ari Aster's *Midsommar* follow-up **DISAPPOINTMENT BLVD**... Kirsten Dunst takes the lead in Alex Garland's sci-fi action drama **CIVIL WAR**... And Kristen Stewart stars in bodybuilding drama **LOVE LIES BLEEDING**, from *Saint Maud* director Rose Glass. As we said: a hell of a year. Bring it! **ALEX GODFREY**





A photograph of Sam Mendes, a man with a grey beard and a dark flat cap, sitting at a dark wooden desk. He is wearing a dark jacket and a patterned scarf. His hands are clasped on the desk. To his right is a vintage-style desk lamp with a brass base and a glass globe. The background is a wall with a wavy, wood-grain pattern. The entire image is framed by a decorative gold border.

A LIFE IN MOVIES

FROM FINDING SOLACE THERE AS A KID, TO MAKING OSCAR-WINNING CLASSICS, **SAM MENDES** HAS ALWAYS LOVED CINEMA. WITH *EMPIRE OF LIGHT*, HE'S CREATED A TRIBUTE TO THE MEDIUM THAT MADE HIM

WORDS IAN FREER



Pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa-papapa, pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-paaaa – PA! The iconic Pearl & Dean theme – ‘Asteroid’ by Pete Moore if you’re interested – was one of the many soundtracks to the teenage life of Sam Mendes (also see: *The Specials*, *Haircut 100*). At his local Oxford fleapit during the early ’80s, he hoovered up the big movies (*Indiana Jones* and *007* obvys) and the smaller ones (*Being There*, *Raging Bull*), all the while devouring his cine-snacks of choice: Maltesers and Liquorice Allsorts. But, looking back, Mendes realises this movie-going habit was not just about catching the latest Gene Wilder-Richard Pryor buddy-comedy.

“It’s the whole experience,” he says. “It’s the place, the atmosphere of the place, the posters for other movies, the trailers, the adverts. It was as much to do with the Pearl & Dean theme or the smell of the popcorn as it was to do with the movies.”

This feeling is beautifully evoked in Mendes’ latest, *Empire Of Light*, but it’s more than just a magic-of-the-movies, *Cinema Paradiso*-type deal. It’s a tougher drama about how movies – and music and poetry – can provide a path through life’s problems, particularly for Hilary (Olivia Colman), suffering from mental illness, and Stephen (Micheel Ward), who gets targeted by racial abuse. The pair begin a May-to-December relationship while working at a Margate cinema in 1981.

Like his viewing tastes, Mendes’ filmmaking career has flitted between the huge (*Jarhead*,

Skyfall, *Spectre*, 1917) and the intimate (*American Beauty*, *Revolutionary Road*, *Away We Go* and now *Empire Of Light*). He may have made his name in the theatre but, as *Empire Of Light* amply demonstrates, Mendes is truly, madly, deeply a man of the cinema. And Maltesers and Liquorice Allsorts.

***Empire Of Light* is set in 1981. If we’d met you in 1981, who would we have been meeting?**

That’s really interesting. I’m just thinking about what I might have been wearing. I had a two-tone suit, a trilby and tassel loafers, but I’m not sure I was still wearing that. I think I might have been going more into an Orange Juice/Haircut 100 phase: pleated baggy cords, desert boots and an Aran sweater. You would have found someone looking for every opportunity to go to the movies and who had probably seen all of the movies that are in this film. Also you would have been meeting somebody who was trying to find a way to define themselves after a pretty rocky childhood, growing up with a mother who, like Hilary, was suffering from mental-health issues.

How did you view your mother?

There’s no question when I was growing up that my mother was heroic for me, because I watched her rail against these awful men who were probably trying to sleep with her and being terrible bosses, like Colin Firth’s character in

this movie. But I also viewed her as self-destructive, and trapped in this cycle that is very difficult to break out of. The experience defined who I am. Everything I believe in the world came out of those years of difficulty and why I went into making theatre and films. Cinema became my second family. In many ways, a first family.

What did the cinema offer you?

The cinema is a place you go to when you’re lost, or when you feel the need for reassurance or some sense of home. These places were created, not just to watch movies, but to let you explore a side of your psyche and your entire emotional landscape that would otherwise be ignored. I remember, particularly as a teenager, being able to get out of the house, away from problems, and go somewhere where you’re not known and nothing is expected of you. In many ways, the film is quite honest about the grub of being in a cinema, half of it collapsing and abandoned. It’s not a glamorous place, but it’s an atmospheric place and it’s a place of warmth, and an escape.

You initially wrote a much more overtly autobiographical film that was about the details of your life. Why didn’t you tell that story?

There’s a great Margo Jefferson line: “How do you reveal yourself without asking for love or pity?” If I’d put myself in a movie, in this particular story – this is not the case for all



Clockwise from left: Olivia Colman — as Hilary — and Micheal Ward — as Stephen — in the shabby-opulent Margate cinema; Look at those 1981 prices!; Norman (Toby Jones) and Stephen in the magic of the projection booth; Director Sam Mendes and Ward enjoy a joke on set.



autobiographical films — I felt I would be saying, “Look at poor me. Do you like me more now? Look what I had to go through.” There was something a bit too self-aggrandising about it. And I didn’t want to do that. When you make a film that is personal, you are in the movie; you’re the camera, you’re grading every shot, you’re channelling yourself through the camera into the movie. So I am in this movie; I’m just not a character in it.

There’s an idea probably cooked up by journalists that filmmakers make one for the studio and one for themselves. Do you make those distinctions between the personal and the populist?

I definitely felt like I had made larger-scale films which exercise a particular part of your brain for the best part of ten years — two Bond movies and *1917*, all of which were significantly large, technical, ambitious films. But within *1917* was a personal story, which is about my grandfather. And it took me closer to being able to tell the more personal story that’s in this movie. So, in a way, I see it as part of the journey from that to this. Do I feel like I’m thinking less about the box-office on this movie than perhaps I have for the last ten years? Yes. But I always want



people to see the movie and I make movies for audiences. I'm not making a movie for myself.

A lot of your characters — *American Beauty*'s Lester Burnham, *Jarhead*'s Anthony Swofford, *Revolutionary Road*'s April and Frank, and now Hilary and Stephen — feel lost in the world. Do you recognise that?

Even my first Bond movie [*Skyfall*] was about a Bond that was lost. For a large part of the film, he didn't know where he was supposed to be or who he was supposed to be. And he had come back to London, just like I had after spending ten years in New York. He came back to discover that everything had changed, and that he wasn't what he thought he was and that he had to relearn everything. It doesn't take much to look at each movie and see where I was in my life when I made it. Swofford was lost looking for a way through, as I was at the time, and *Revolutionary Road*, which is about a marriage that is beginning to fracture.

You said at the time that *Revolutionary Road* was a meta experience. What did you mean by that?

You do the math, Ian. I was directing my wife [Kate Winslet] in a movie about a failed marriage, and a year later, my marriage to that person failed. What else do I need to say? [laughs]

Okay! You also suggested that if *Revolutionary Road* was about the relationship you were in,

your next film, *Away We Go*, about a couple on the cusp of having a baby, was about the relationship you wanted to be in.

That's very fair. *Away We Go* was a sort of release. There's a freedom in the movie, a freedom with the couple, a sense they weren't being tied down. And also a nostalgia for that moment before you have a child, when you know you're gonna have the responsibility for another human being, you know everything's going to change and you know your life is going to be different. And there's that magical time just before that when you're still standing on the precipice. I loved that time. So, there was a lot in it that wasn't just about, "This is what I want to have." There was a little bit about, "This is what I miss," through no-one's fault, not pointing the finger at anyone, but this is what life does: things change, you change and your partner changes. Sometimes you can't get back to the things that brought you together in the first place. And in a way, *Away We Go* is about that moment when you're perfectly together, when the two of you are about to become three.

***Empire Of Light* is partly about the power of watching films. What are the most memorable screenings of your own films?**

The only preview of *American Beauty*. Spielberg saw it and said, "This is an amazing film, you don't need to preview it." And I said, "You don't understand. I'm from the theatre. I'm used to previewing. Unless I put it in front of an audience, it almost feels like the movie doesn't exist for

me." So, he said, "Okay." When we first arrived in Orange County, where we were previewing it, all these guys shuffled in and I thought, "We're fucked." They were dressed for the beach, everybody was in flip-flops. I don't know why, I just felt, "They're gonna hate this, it's too weird." I got up on stage and said, "So, who didn't like the film?" And three people put their hand up. And I said, "Who liked the film?" And about 20 people put their hand up. And I said, "What else is there?" And a guy down the front said, "Ask who really liked it." And I said, "Okay, who really liked it?" and the rest of the audience put their hands up. I thought, "Wow, we're onto something here."

The big Bond premieres must have also been special.

I remember the premiere of *Skyfall* at the Royal Albert Hall very fondly. You work so hard making Bond to cut out the white noise, so I was in a bubble. You don't read the rumours, the chat threads, the reviews of the trailer, the song, the title; you just keep yourself focused on what you're doing, to make a good movie that you would like. I turned up at the Royal Albert Hall to see my movie, and there were thousands and thousands of people in the street just waiting to cheer the cars in. They weren't even waiting for selfies because they were too far away. I suddenly felt the weight of responsibility — I made this for them. You're the custodian of something like Bond. It's not the same as directing other movies; you feel that it's theirs, and you're just looking

Alamy



Clockwise from left: The Empire (not us!) team, ready to greet their customers; Mendes and Kate Winslet on the set of 2008's *Revolutionary Road*; Paul Newman and Tom Hanks in *Road To Perdition* (2002); Mendes and Daniel Craig making *Skyfall* (2012).



after it temporarily, hoping that you can do a good job. And that was very moving — feeling that crowd love that film in that particular moment. 2012, the Olympics, a sense of real national pride, which is very rare in this country and has certainly evaporated since. It just felt like this was the right time and the right place. We're home. It's a British movie. And that was a lovely feeling.

Before screenings, where do you find the magic in the process? It must have been magical looking through [legendary cinematographer] Conrad Hall's lens at Paul Newman and Tom Hanks during *Road To Perdition*.

I was aware of that. I did think, "Blimey, that's amazing." I particularly felt it with Paul Newman. It was his last performance and it was a man we'd all grown up with. The scene where Tom Hanks, playing Michael Sullivan, was shooting his surrogate father, played by Paul Newman, we were filming in the pouring rain. We were shooting gruelling 18-hour days and Tom was soaked to the skin. I looked at him across the road and he was drenched and freezing cold and I felt really guilty, as you often do as a film director. I went over to him and said, "Look, I'm really sorry we've gone over. Are you okay?" And he looked at me and he said, "Am I okay? Well, I'm on the Warner Bros. backlot dressed as a gangster and I'm shooting Paul fuckin' Newman. Of course I'm okay." That was a moment where everything comes into perspective. Now is not the moment

to moan. I learned a lot from that moment, from Tom's sheer gratitude. You learn gratitude.

I remember when we spoke for *1917*, you told me that you were on a plane, and you decided to watch *Cabaret*, because you wanted to remind yourself of really good editing. Yeah, that's true. Well remembered.

Are there films that you appreciate more since you've become a director?

Oh, yes. I think you definitely appreciate how difficult it is to make a great movie. So, when you rewatch a *400 Blows*, or *The Social Network*, it's just sheer craft. I think when you know how to make a movie, you really see the brilliance of what people like David [Fincher] can do. I feel that about a couple of the Nolan movies, too. There are sections of *Interstellar* that I just think, "That is just fabulous filmmaking, hats off," because that is hard and they are making it look so easy. I love the cut from the truck to the rocket ship. I love the stuff with the drone. The first 25 minutes of that movie got me. I think some of Fincher's best work is in his pulpiest movies, in a way. *Gone Girl* is an amazing piece of filmmaking. It's a very strange, haunting film, a little bit like Hitchcock movies, that I think will grow as time goes on. What I really love about looking at the work of other directors through the prism of being a director is when it's working, you're like, "I can't believe you pulled that off."

I remember at the *Empire Awards* you gave a lovely speech thanking your favourite directors for some of their most memorable moments.

Yeah, I got a really hard time from Helen Mirren about the fact that there were no women filmmakers. Quite right, fair enough.

Is that what you think films are about, these magical moments?

I think what you're hoping for when you make a film is that a piece of it lodges in someone's subconscious and they can never really get it out. When I first sat down in the Odeon on Shaftesbury Avenue to watch *Pulp Fiction* in 1994 and I was in that diner for the first time — I'll never forget it. I thought, "This is iconic. This will change film." And it did. In my lifetime, certainly in the last 30 years, that is the most important movie for me. So, that's what you're looking for. You're not consciously thinking, "How can I get into someone's subconscious?", but if you construct the thing right, some parts of it will remain. We collect those scenes and moments almost like you collect playing cards. You can't hold a whole film in your head, but scenes and shots live on.

If you're going to pick a scene or shot to stand for your own work, what would you pick?

Gosh. Well, I could pick the whole of *1917* because it's just one shot, right? 📍

EMPIRE OF LIGHT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 13 JANUARY 2023



THE

WEDNESDAY



WORDS AL HORNER





◆◆◆
IN HIS QUEST TO MAKE A FILM ABOUT ONE OF THE
MOST HEDONISTIC ERAS IN HOLLYWOOD, DIRECTOR
DAMIEN CHAZELLE WAS DETERMINED NOT TO BE COY.
HE AND HIS CAST LEAD US THROUGH THE GATES OF
RIOUS 1920S EPIC **BABYLON**

"IF **LA LA LAND** WAS A LOVE LETTER TO HOLLYWOOD," SAYS DAMIEN CHAZELLE, "**BABYLON** IS ONE WRITTEN WITH A POISON PEN."

It's early in Los Angeles, and the director is attempting to address the elephant in the room. Not the elephant that violently shits everywhere (and we mean *everywhere*) within the opening minutes of his latest spectacle (more on that long-trunked fellow shortly). No, what Chazelle really wants to clear up is that he's aware his upcoming fifth feature might sound like it has a thing or two in common with the swooning musical that, in 2016, underlined him as one of American cinema's most vital new talents. Set in Hollywood? Tick. Chock-full of characters chasing Tinseltown dreams? Tick. A jazz-trumpet-heavy soundtrack and a plot that pays tribute to the art of moviemaking itself? Tick and tick again.

But *Babylon*, he says, could hardly be more different. For starters, there's the period setting: the 1920s. Oh, and last time he checked, *La La Land* was a wholesome, sing-along romance. Not, as he recalls, an orgy of pissing sex workers, cocaine, and dancers bouncing around on penis-themed pogo sticks. "1920s Hollywood really was a cesspool of vice, hubris and excess," Chazelle laughs. "We tried to put that on screen. *All of it.*"

"There's a dizzying amount of debauchery," agrees Margot Robbie, who co-stars in this tale of a Hollywood era so hedonistic, you can practically taste the absinthe seeping from the celluloid. "One of the most disturbing, chaotic scenes I've ever witnessed is in this film, and it involves a fight with a snake," she grins. "I won't tell you who wins or loses that fight, but trust me, it's insane." Robbie, lest we forget, knows a thing or two about insanity, having made her breakout performance in Martin Scorsese's 2013 *Quaaludes-and-capitalism romp The Wolf of Wall Street*. "I remember being on set for [that movie] and thinking, 'I'll never be in a film as crazy as this ever again,'" she tells *Empire*. A smile, a pause. "And then I made *Babylon*."

Take a story of sex, drugs and shitting elephants. Add an all-star cast featuring the likes of Brad Pitt, Jean Smart, Tobey Maguire and Olivia Wilde alongside Robbie, next to next-big-thing talents such as Diego Calva (*Narcos: Mexico*) and Li Jun Li (*Quantico*). Throw in a budget reported in some places as \$110 million and, well, a sense of how mad this movie is begins to dawn. What's truly mad, however, is the fact that *Babylon's* debauchery is based on truth. There really is a hidden, sordid side of Hollywood history that's seldom been seen on screen, that Chazelle and his cast had a riot ripping the curtain back to reveal. *Babylon*, the director says, doesn't just slap-bang audiences into some of 1920s LA's most cacophonous parties and film productions. It also probes a perhaps unanswerable question: how did the most decadent era of filmmaking in American movie history result in so many of the most incredible, heavenly-seeming feats ever committed to camera?

"Hollywood back then was a place where, from the most depraved animalistic behaviour, emerged these works of art that were so beautiful and alluring," says Chazelle. That was the paradox that fascinated him; the contradiction that compelled him to make this most epically immodest of blockbusters.



Top to bottom: The wild Nellie LaRoy (Margot Robbie); Film star Jack Conrad (film star Brad Pitt); Director Damien Chazelle on set; Main man Manny Torres (Diego Calva) — clearly no *Empires* left.





Here: Aspiring actor Nellie knows how to make an entrance.
Below left: Manny with Elinor St. John, played by Broadway and screen legend Jean Smart.



THE BEGINNINGS OF

Babylon — named after the Biblical city of sin — lie in 2008. Damien Chazelle had just arrived in Hollywood from New Jersey, resembling the sort of character who might occupy a Damien Chazelle movie. Like Ryan Gosling's moon-bound astronaut in *First Man*, Miles Teller's hell-bent drum student in *Whiplash* and yes, Emma Stone's aspiring actress in *La La Land*, he was hungry and determined, undeterred by near-impossible odds. "I thought I'd stay in LA for maybe a year, to give it a shot," he recalls. Immediately, as an aspiring director who worshipped at the altar of old Hollywood, he found himself overwhelmed by the romance and history of the place — a city "built by the movies" where every street slab seemed laden with stories of movie stars past.

It wasn't long before he started contemplating a movie exploring that history. Just one problem, though — what he had in mind would require an amount of money almost as extravagant as a Babylon-era blow-out. "So I put it to the side

and every now and again I'd do some reading and research," he says. That research threw out some incredible findings. "The picture of the past [we think we know] has been sugar-coated. The quaint past commonly referred to as the 'Roaring Twenties' consists in our imaginations of very well-dressed people doing the Charleston." In reality, it was a hurricane of cocaine frenzies, lawlessness on set and tawdry affairs off it. "Hollywood back then was this out-of-control beast — a renegade outpost of misfits and rebels and even people running from the law," Chazelle explains. The town's legendary parties and even methods of filmmaking reflected that, he discovered.

Progress on the script "simmered for ten-plus years." Across that decade, something unexpected happened: Chazelle became, as Christopher Nolan once put it in an essay heaping praise on the newcomer, "one of our most exciting and accomplished directors". After the release of his low-budget first feature, *Guy And Madeline On A Park Bench*, the director made *Whiplash*, in which J.K. Simmons plays a drum tutor who terrorizes his most promising student. It went from short film to Sundance Festival mega-hit, setting expectations high for his follow-up, *La La Land*. Grossing \$447 million and scoring six Oscars (even if it did memorably miss out on Best Picture, following that famous snafu involving Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight*), it elevated Chazelle onto the A-list. So much so that by 2018, Steven Spielberg was eager to work with him, executive-producing his moving biopic *First Man*, in which Gosling took a giant leap for mankind into the shoes of Neil Armstrong.

These projects were all different. "I love doing a 180 after any given movie," explains Chazelle. Look closer, though, and there was connective tissue to be found amongst this eclectic array of films. Each one followed characters with big dreams, detailing the blood, sweat and tears spilt in their attempting to achieve the sublime, whether walking on the moon or merely a movie set. "I've always been really interested in stories about the work it takes to achieve something," he says. "As a kid, >

you can be taught this lie that if you want something badly enough, you'll get it — but that's not really telling the whole story."

Chazelle says that he loves to "cast a magnifying glass on the parts of the process that those sorts of fables sometimes skip — the cost that to the larger world might be hidden, but to the people at the centre of these stories is a dominant part of their narrative." In *La La Land*, that translated to failed audition after failed audition for Stone's trod-upon Mia. In *Whiplash*, it was hours and hours of practice and psychological torture at the hands of a tyrannical tutor. In *Babylon*, a film told through the eyes of an ambitious go-getter named Manny, who longs to be at home amongst the glitz and glamour of Hollywood, it translates to fishing drunk movie stars out of swimming pools after they tumble from balconies. It means racing through orange groves at breakneck speeds to procure a camera. It means the occasional joyride in a stolen ambulance. You know, the usual.

"He's been trying all his life to be part of something that matters," says the man who portrays him, Diego Calva. "He begins the movie trying to find his way into the industry by any way possible — and I mean any way possible." That mission puts him on a crash course with Robbie's wild-eyed Nellie, an aspiring actress who, as Robbie puts it, "doesn't think about the consequences of anything she does. She didn't grow up in the best [environment] and thought she would be dead by now, so every day she has, she tries to live in the moment. She's my favourite character I've ever played."

The in-roads they make into the Hollywood dream factory lead to encounters with a perpetually drunk fading thesp named Jack Conrad (Pitt), and a world-weary but enigmatic singer and dancer named Lady Fay Zhu (Li), who is based on groundbreaking real-life silent-era star Anna May Wong. Together, their adventures "shine a new light on Hollywood in a very chaotic, meth-amphetamine way," Calva chuckles. "I don't think there's been a story like this on this scale before."

Ah yes, the scale. There's a reason why *Babylon* required its hefty (for a non-superhero movie) budget. Post-*La La Land*, Chazelle had an unmistakable buzz around him — the sort that allows a director to make almost any project they like. The gates of *Babylon* had finally opened. It was to be another tale of dreamers, showing 1920s Hollywood in all of its absurdity — the comical, the tragic, the terrifying and everything in-between. But there was one caveat to the film he wished to create. *Babylon* had to be for real. In 1920s Tinseltown, there were no computer effects to fall back on. Much depicted in those decades had to be shot practically. It felt only right that *Babylon* followed suit. Within reason.

SO, ABOUT THAT defecating elephant. *Babylon* begins with Manny — at this point a lowly Hollywood helper — in the desert, tasked with delivering an elephant to a party. Unfortunately there's been a mix-up. The driver that's meant to transport the animal thought he was there to collect a horse. Manny bribes him to take the creature anyway, despite his truck being way too small to carry a seven-ton animal. Cut to all hell breaking loose, Manny frantically trying to stop the vehicle rolling back down a mountain, and the elephant unleashing his bowels all over the camera and the scene's poor, poor characters.

"Quite the introduction, isn't it?" laughs Calva. "The elephant wasn't real — I think being surrounded by all that cast, crew and extras wouldn't have been much fun for the animal. But everything else was really there. If there are a thousand people dancing on screen, there really were a thousand people in front of the camera. It was crazy being on a set this big and this ambitious." Li adds that "it was wild. At one point we had



Right, top to bottom: Nellie and Manny, happy with this close-up; Jack and Manny make a dapper duo.



This page, top to bottom: Jovan Adepo plays jazz trumpeter Sidney Palmer; Sidney and George Munn (Lukas Haas) with Manny; Nellie, irrepressible as ever, stealing the scene.





700 extras in the desert, roasting under the sun. It was bigger than anything I could have imagined. All of the parties on screen were as real as they could get. Minus the drinking and drugs, obviously," she laughs.

Li's Lady Fay is one of many characters in *Babylon* who come from backgrounds rarely given their due when Hollywood tells its own history. That was one thing Chazelle was keen to shine a light on, amid all the excess elsewhere in the film — the contributions of people of colour to the formation of Hollywood, who were subsequently erased from that story. "*Babylon* has a lot of characters — Asian characters, Black characters, Mexican characters, Latino characters — who, when we think of 1920s Hollywood, don't have a face, don't have a presence. But they were there," says Calva.

That representation extends to the LGBTQ+ community too. "There were a number of actors at that time who were in same-sex relationships and had to hide it, or were threatened by the studios and had their careers held hostage," says Robbie. "That's one of the crucial elements of my character's journey and an important thing to explore." Anna May Wong, the

Hollywood screen siren who inspired the character of Lady Fay, was marginalised in her lifetime due to her race and, according to rumours, her queerness. "The racism and discrimination that [she] faced was really heartbreaking," says Li. "*Babylon* invites you to not just see and hear that, but really feel it."

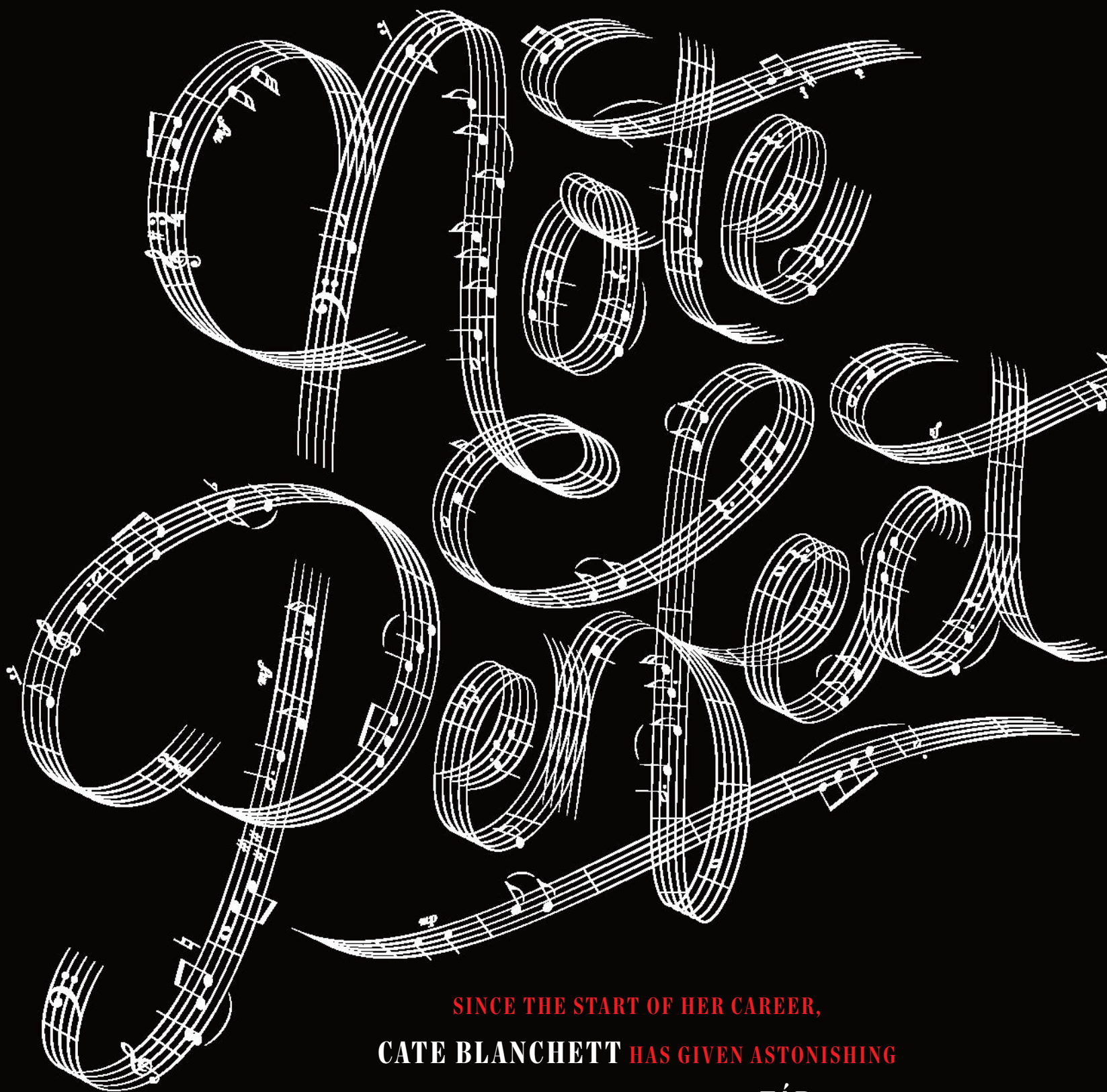
This is something all the cast are keen to emphasise — that as well as some of the most messed-up behaviour you'll see on screen in 2023, *Babylon* has emotional and societal depth. "There are hysterical, laugh-out-loud moments. Then there are hits-you-in-the-gut emotional moments too. To these characters, being on a film set is the most magical thing in the world, and you get to really feel that, to be there with them," says Robbie. "All that, *and* you get to watch me fight a snake!"

Chazelle says that beneath the bombast and pogo-ing penises, it's a story about change — the rise and fall (or at least, adapting into something else) of an empire. "Any time you become interested in a society, you become interested in how it fell or changed and what it gave way to. That time in Hollywood no longer exists. It got swept away. The film is kinda about what it was like to be one of those swept away — what it felt like on the ground," he says. "By the end of the decade, the whole town had become formalised, with much stricter moral codes being passed down onto filmmakers. There were a lot of changes: some of which were very good, others not so good. The cumulative effect was that this circus then became the Hollywood we know today."

But make no mistake — degeneracy and depravity are front and centre in *Babylon*. Robbie remembers the first time she read its script. "I was like, 'Woah, it's like *Wolf of Wall Street* and *La Dolce Vita* had a baby,'" she laughs. "You know that nauseating feeling you get watching *La Dolce Vita*, where it's like, 'I wanna get off the merry-go-round now, I'm dizzy and sick'? *Babylon* has that feeling. You're forever waiting for grown-ups to barge into the room and put a stop to the madness."

No such luck. Instead, the madness of *Babylon* is relentless. "It's a big swing," says Chazelle, acknowledging the film's risqué nature. A big swing of a movie about a seriously swinging time? Now that seems appropriate. Get ready for one hell of a party. 🍷

BABYLON IS IN CINEMAS FROM 20 JANUARY 2023



SINCE THE START OF HER CAREER,
CATE BLANCHETT HAS GIVEN ASTONISHING
PERFORMANCES. WITH MUSIC DRAMA **TÁR**, THOUGH,
SHE IS BETTER THAN EVER. WE ASK HER HOW SHE DOES IT

WORDS  OLLY RICHARDS

PORTRAITS  MARY MCCARTNEY

TYPE  GREG COULTON



Cate Blanchett, photographed
exclusively for *Empire* at
Abbey Road Studios, London,
on 3 July 2022.



IF YOU'RE EVER HAVING A NICE CHAT WITH **CATE BLANCHETT** AND WANT TO STOP IT DEAD IN ITS TRACKS, ASK HER ABOUT ACTING.

It's like throwing a bucket of water over her. "I couldn't be less interested in talking about it," she says, slowly folding her arms as if this might deflect the question. She would rather talk about anything else. She'd like to talk about her garden (her onions are doing well). She'd like to talk about how amazing it is that we're standing about 15 metres from where The Beatles recorded (we're in Abbey Road Studios, which we'll explain later). Just please, oh God, not acting. Unfortunately, we're going to make her talk about it because, you may have noticed, she's really very good at it. And in her new film she's about the best at it she's ever been.

Written and directed by Todd Field, *TÁR* stars Blanchett as Lydia Tár, a fictional conductor at the peak of her profession. Tár is the first female conductor of an unnamed Berlin orchestra,

though hates that it's the "female" bit that qualifies her achievement. She's an EGOT (winner of an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony). She's about to embark on her crowning glory, a live recording of Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 5*, a famously complicated work (it says here). She's almost running out of things to achieve. But the top is a dangerous place. There is gossip about Tár using her position to seduce women who work for her. As her pedestal begins to crumble, Tár finds herself isolated. And *something* is haunting her. Her mind and life seem to be unravelling in tandem.

The list of great Cate Blanchett performances is not short. It's pretty much a list of all Cate Blanchett's performances. After 1997's *Oscar And Lucinda* she was talked of as a talent to watch. The next year she played Elizabeth I and showed she was a talent you couldn't tear your eyes from. So it's been ever since. *The Aviator*. *Notes On A Scandal*. *Blue Jasmine*. *Carol*. You might find some duff films on her CV, but you won't find a duff performance.

TÁR, though, sees Blanchett operating on a different level. She's ripping through layers of a complicated, troubled woman in a way that leaves you wrung out just spectating. It's like watching Whitney Houston sing or Gene Kelly dance. You know they're made of approximately all the same bits as you, but it's impossible to fathom how they've been able to put them to much more remarkable use. At 53, Blanchett is doing the most astonishing work of her career.

The reason we're at Abbey Road is because Field and

Blanchett are, in a very meta move, making a concept album inspired by Tár's planned Mahler album. Blanchett is readying herself to conduct the Dresden Philharmonic (the orchestra in the film), who will arrive tomorrow. Their chairs are set up, expectantly awaiting orchestral bottoms. "It's all in the breath," says Blanchett, waving her hand gently in the air. "If you stop breathing, you break the communication with the orchestra. You stop thinking when you stop breathing."

She will talk about conducting for as long as you like. She spent months studying it — the right hand keeps tempo; the left instructs the orchestra — as well as learning to play the piano so well that she could interpret a Bach piece in multiple ways. She likes to talk about the brilliant people who taught her things, but resists any talk of her own skills. We try to take her back to the first note of her performance. As it turns out, becoming Lydia Tár began as all Blanchett's favourite roles do: with absolute terror and confusion.

TODD FIELD HAS BEEN THINKING ABOUT Cate Blanchett for a long time. If you can't quite place his name, it's because he hasn't made a film in 16 years. In the '00s, he directed *In The Bedroom* and *Little Children*, received a load of Oscar nominations and acclaim, then disappeared. In the time since, he started projects, but they all collapsed. The break was largely a choice: directing was taking Field away from his young family, and when his wife became pregnant with another, he vowed he wouldn't miss a minute of his youngest's childhood unless it were for something unmissable.

One project, though, left a remnant that wouldn't shift. Back in 2012, Field was writing a political thriller with Joan Didion. It fell through, but not before he'd spoken to Blanchett about playing the lead. She lurked at the edges of his mind for years, until in 2020 he began writing *TÁR*, his children now mostly grown. The character kept assuming a familiar face. "I didn't tell anyone. I didn't tell the studio. They thought I was writing this about a man. I thought, 'How do I want to tell this story?' And I thought it had to be a woman and... it's Cate."

He was terrified about actually asking, but sent her the script, which he never does before meeting an actor. When Blanchett received it, she was just as frightened. She had no idea what she was expected to do with this woman. Field had written someone difficult and guarded, "whose entire life is driven by transactional relationships," he says. Tár never explains herself or opens up to anyone. She's a firmly closed book.

"It was mind-blowing," says Blanchett. "Because I didn't know what it was. That, for me, is the most exciting and dangerous way to start a project. Often when you read something you can admire it, but if you know exactly what it is, then you should hand it over to someone else, because it's already made in your head. I had no idea how to approach this."

Blanchett set to work immediately. "She >



Right, top to bottom: Blanchett with *TÁR* director Todd Field, singing from the same score; As fierce and formidable conductor Lydia Tár; Nina Hoss plays Tár's partner, Sharon Goodnow.

started working a year before we started working,” says Field. Blanchett shot two other features between saying yes to *TÁR* and starting production. “She’d wrap a 12-hour day on another film then get to work on this,” says Field. “I’d be on the phone to her at midnight, her time, going through material. She memorised the whole script. Not just the words. Every stage direction, every comma, every period.”

Blanchett never really stops preparing. She has an iPad full of bits of characters; pages of notes, links and clips that make sense only to her but might one day become a fragment of a character’s life. They might not have been assigned to a particular character when she saves them. “You never know where the key to a character lies,” she says. “Sometimes it’s in a conversation, in a piece of music you listen to, or a gesture someone did.” She laughs as she remembers one of the references for *TÁR*.

“I’ve got [a clip of] some firefighter from Arkansas,” she says, her face screwed up in confusion at how her own brain works. “He’s being interviewed about some natural disaster. This big, hairy guy. I thought, ‘Why is he there?’” She watched the clip and noticed a brief change in the man’s face. “He said something with great certainty and then he doubted it and did this strange gesture. There was a pullback. I thought it was interesting. Not that I’m going to necessarily replicate the gesture, but I saw an interesting relationship to the information he’d just said.”

That iPad is a place for new characters to gestate, but also a sort of crypt for the ones who never made it. She can’t bring herself to delete them. She recently found a file she’d made for Lady Marchmain in *Brideshead Revisited*, which she was going to make with Luca Guadagnino. “I thought, ‘I should delete this, because it’s not going to happen now.’ But I was reading it on a train and I thought, ‘These are interesting thoughts. Who knows what they’re going to become?’”

Blanchett isn’t really one for constructing intricate backstory, unless the director wants it. “Guillermo del Toro absolutely loves backstory,” she says of the director she worked with on *Nightmare Alley*. “He’ll talk about it for hours and hours so that the actors and he are on the same page as soon as they enter the frame.” Sometimes she thinks “it can be lip-service” and it makes more sense to “just walk on set and see what happens”. For *TÁR*, she and Field spent weeks shooting backstory. The script is far longer than we see in the final cut. They shot much more, but it was never meant to be seen — it was so it would seep into Blanchett’s mind. “I see it as part of the rehearsal,” says Field, who uses this technique on all his films. “We shot a lot of things that are sort of homoeopathically still there [in her performance].”

If that sounds like it might be boring, Field says it can be. He hadn’t much missed making movies. Asked if he enjoys them, he says simply, “Not really.” But he didn’t get bored with Blanchett. “The worst thing is you become uninterested in the thing you’re working on,” he says, “and that’s a real possibility. You must work with people who give the best chance of that not happening. Cate is a tremendous insurance policy against losing interest. She brings this ferocious intelligence. She lays herself right on the fire.”



BROADLY SPEAKING, ACTORS TEND TO mellow in the second half of their career. The ‘disrupt the system’ acting is for the young. *TÁR* suggests Blanchett is going the opposite way. Her film work has never been especially provocative. Not that she’s *safe*. She’s been avant-garde — playing Bob Dylan in *I’m Not There* or 13 different people in *Manifesto* — but she’s never really trying to confront her audience or cause arguments. That’s less true in her theatre work, which can be... challenging. In 2012 she appeared in *Gross Und Klein*, a wilfully impenetrable German play *The Telegraph* called “about as bleak a two-and-three-quarter hours as you’re likely to while away in the theatre”. In 2019’s *When We Have Sufficiently Tortured Each Other* she pretended to penetrate Stephen Dillane with a strap-on in a sadomasochistic dissection of a marriage. *TÁR* sees her bringing some of that pokiness to the screen.

The film is laden with complex themes, not least a take on the #MeToo movement, but with the aggressor a woman, Tár, not a man. And there’s a key scene in which Tár eviscerates a student who tells her that “as a BIPOC pangender person” they won’t play Bach because the composer is all the patriarchal things they loathe. She ties them up in their own identity politics until they storm out. It’s the kind of scene you can imagine causing some



Right, top to bottom: Blanchett and Field in conversation; Tár consumed by her work; Alive to every sound; A startling moment for the virtuoso musician.



furious 'hot takes' on social media if anyone chooses to take it at face value. And there may be some discussion about a male director commenting on sexual harassment via a female character. This film could make people angry. That's fine by Blanchett.

"We're terribly frightened of anger," she says, leaning forward. This is the stuff she likes to talk about. "I think anger is a really useful, propulsive, transitional tool. You don't want to live in it, but to be frightened of it, to shut down discussions because of it, I think is really dangerous. This film is provocative, but provocation is important."

Blanchett loves to have her own ideas confronted. "To be in agreement all the time, to be in a room where everyone thinks the same way or speaks the same way, I'll run a mile. I think that's what's wrong with democracy at the moment. We've lost that robust townhall debate." She brings it all back neatly to music and conducting. "You can only hear harmony if you've heard discord," she says. "You've got to tune the instrument."

BLANCHETT HAS BEEN TUNING HER INSTRUMENT FOR over 25 years now. In the quarter of a century since her first movie, *Paradise Road*, she's racked up 60 film acting credits, not including short films or television. That's a lot. Tom Cruise only



Right, top to bottom: Taking charge as the iconic monarch in 1998's *Elizabeth*; Alongside Leonardo DiCaprio in *The Aviator* (2004); *Blue Jasmine*'s (2013) troubled New York socialite; With Rooney Mara in *Carol* (2015).

has 47 and he's been going 16 years longer. Julia Roberts has 52. Famously prolific Nicole Kidman has 68, with a 14-year head start. Blanchett gasps when we tell her the number. "Terrible!" Well, it definitely isn't terrible, but it does suggest someone who *needs* to work. "I do find it hard to say no," she says. "Some things I should have said no to." She never really lets herself stop working and isn't sure what she'd do if she did. "I need to develop some hobbies," she says. "But I suppose work is my hobby. Or it's a compulsion."

She looks almost apologetic when she says this, like she shouldn't want to work so much. Reading past interviews in preparation for our meeting, there was a theme that kept coming up, which seems to contradict the idea of a compulsion. There's a recurring suggestion she doesn't believe this will last. After filming *Elizabeth*, her Oscar-nominated breakout, she called her agent to tell her, "I think I've ended my career before it's even begun." After *Carol*, another Oscar nomination, she said she thought she had maybe a couple of years of work left. In a chat with Julia Roberts for *Interview* magazine, she said she might give it all up and garden. Is this self-deprecation, or does she actually think about stopping? And is it just so journalists will stop asking her about acting?

"I reserve the right to walk away," she says with mock-imperiousness. "Everyone has a different relationship with work, but I do need to be seduced back into it." So it's not that she has a compulsion to work for the sake of work, but that she keeps getting seduced. And she likes to be the seduced rather than the seducer. She still has a big list of directors she wants to work with — Ari Aster, Jane Campion, Park Chan-wook, Kelly Reichardt — but she hasn't let them know. "I'm quite shy," she says. The only one she's not shy with is Scorsese, who directed her in *The Aviator*. "Every time I see him I say, 'Come on. I'm not getting any younger. When are you going to make a film with a fucking woman at the centre?'" She says it so fiercely, you have to assume Scorsese is somewhere writing in a panic right now.

When talking about *TÁR*'s fixations, there's something Blanchett says that seems to be more a window into her own thoughts, and suggests she won't be giving up any time soon. "Lydia is obsessed with the notion of legacy," she says. "As are most conductors, because their job is so ephemeral. It's lightning in a bottle. How do you capture that?" She keeps asking herself rhetorical questions until her point suddenly takes a turn. "It's a little bit like being a creature of the theatre. Once you've given your Blanche, your Hedda Gabler, your Electra, your Medea, it's gone. You can film it, but it doesn't capture the presence." Perhaps Blanchett, who always has a revolving cast of characters inside her, can't stop working because each time she finishes a role, a little bit of her is gone. She wants to keep hold of that presence. When you're known as probably the greatest actress of your generation, who are you when you stop acting? Are you just someone else's notes to save on their iPad?

Sometimes the presence won't leave. Blanchett remembers a night during the filming of *TÁR*. She was coming home every evening and couldn't relax. She'd play the piano or sit alone listening to Shostakovich. Lydia stuff. "I was consumed by it," she says. "I woke up one night and I saw my hand going like this." She starts miming gentle conducting motions, guiding unheard music for the empty orchestra seats behind her. "Like, 'What is going on?'"

Cate Blanchett doesn't want to talk about acting because she's too busy doing it. She's so good, she can do it in her sleep. 🍷



TÁR IS IN CINEMAS FROM 13 JANUARY 2023







AN AUDIENCE WITH THE KING

ILLUSTRATION JAMES DAWE

As **JAMES CAMERON**, the director of the world's biggest film, returns from a 13-year hiatus with *Avatar: The Way Of Water*, we thought he deserved the ultimate interview. So we asked a host of A-listers to pose the burning questions they've always wanted to ask...

SIGOURNEY WEAVER



How did you first imagine the Na'vi? Why blue?

I wanted to do a story set on an alien world that was both beautiful and terrifying, but I wanted the audience to experience it through the eyes of the Indigenous people. So, I did a lot of research on Indigenous cultures all over our world, and tried to draw some common denominators, such as their innate reverence for the living world around them, and their methods for cooperation and conflict resolution, as well as their spiritual traditions. I wanted the audience to side with the Indigenous people and see the humans as the invaders from space who were ravaging their world. A flip on all the 'aliens invade Earth' stories we grew up with. I was betting that through the power of cinema the audience could be taken on a journey in which they became the enemy, and maybe as a result saw themselves, however briefly, as nature sees us. Alien. Invader. Destroyer.

The design of the Na'vi was the result of an intensive design process with some really talented creature and character artists. Some of the early designs came out too amphibious or lizard-like. I wanted relatability. I figured we can relate to dogs and cats emotionally, so we gave the Na'vi expressive tails and ears that had that familiarity. In the end, their most alien features were their scale and their colour.

As for the colour: green was taken. There was a long history of green aliens. Plus, the Hulk. And the human colours, pinks and browns, weren't alien. SpongeBob was yellow. That pretty much left blue and purple. Purple is my favorite colour, but I figured we'd use that for one of our main bioluminescence colours, which we did, associating it with Eywa and anything sacred to the Na'vi. Also, my mom told me about this dream she had where there was a ten-foot-tall blue woman with six breasts. Cool image. I drew her, but the six breasts thing didn't come out looking as good as it sounds, plus would mess with the rating. So, anyway... blue.

Now you're blue (again) in the new movie. Blue and 15 years old. I think the blue part is a much bigger stretch for you than being 15. You're basically 15 at heart.

GUILLERMO DEL TORO



For you, expression and technology — story and form — make each other possible, but you never rely on virtuosity — you always subordinate your film language to the dramatic needs of the tale. How early did you hit onto this notion and how does it come so naturally to you?

I think every filmmaker finds their own style as they go along, which is a composite of their influences — the things observed in others' work that inspired us to go into it in the first place — and our own experiments with technique. I've





Clockwise from main: The way they were: Jake (Sam Worthington) and Neytiri (Zoe Saldana) in 2009's *Avatar*; Long-time Cameron collaborator Arnold Schwarzenegger takes aim in *True Lies* (1994); Jake returns to the big screen in December's much-anticipated sequel, *Avatar: The Way Of Water*.

always been more interested in substance than form: what's the story I'm here to tell? What do I want the audience to feel? Stylistic flourishes like shaky hand-held subjective shots or a painterly proscenium frame with classic Renaissance composition occur to me in the moment, or maybe in advance during the writing and design processes, only in terms of how they advance narrative and emotion. I do strive to give the audience a sense of physical and emotional "presence", so subjectivity of the camera is important. You do this so beautifully with your sinuous short-lens tracking shots, that put you RIGHT THERE with the characters.

In general, I'm not interested in what I think of as "show-off" shots — endless "oners" that appeal primarily to cineastes. I don't want to draw attention to myself as an auteur, I just want to tell the story as effectively as possible. I can appreciate it when others do it, but I don't spend energy on it myself, mostly because I don't think the audience cares. They don't think in cuts the way we do as practitioners of the craft. All that said, there's nothing more satisfying than when you design a shot that's a bit outside your comfort zone, and it's exactly the right shot for the moment. Like when I used a 10mm fisheye, which I had never used, for Arnold's POV in *True Lies*, to create his drugged state, and it worked perfectly. Any director who came up through music videos would have laughed at my childlike glee discovering the fisheye.

EDGAR WRIGHT



James, you have been so supportive of me in recent years, I would like you NEVER to watch the *Titanic* spoof that I did with French and Saunders. Now that I've got that off my chest... I am fascinated with your start in the industry, working for Roger Corman on second-unit, miniature work for *Battle Beyond The Stars*, and special effects on *Escape From New York*. What grounding did work in these departments give you going into your first feature films?

Hi, Edgar. Don't sweat the *Titanic* spoof. May we all be blessed with making films that get spoofs.

My early experience working with Corman taught me a lot of things, from the rock-bottom basics of production and shooting to a sense of confidence that came from working, however briefly, in just about every department. I could load an Arri 2C, run a Moviola upright, and know what type of paint to use on the set at 3am when the camera crew was coming in at 0600. When I got my own film going, *The Terminator*, I knew enough about everyone's jobs, from grip to set designer to editor to visual effects, that I could direct them efficiently, without wasted energy. Which was critical on a visually ambitious film with such a low budget.

Did you have any trepidation taking on the sequel to *Alien*? And is the story of your pitch meeting for *Aliens* true, where you wrote "*Alien*" on a whiteboard, added an "s" and then turned the "s" into a dollar sign?

I had lunch with a bigshot producer when I was about to start *Aliens* who said, "This is a no-win for you. If your movie's good, Ridley will get the credit. If it's bad, it's all you. It's a career ender." I said, "Yeah, buuuuuut... I like it." I was maybe a dumbass fanboy, but I could see it so clearly in my head that I just had to go make it. And yes, it's true. I was in a meeting with the studio head and the executive producers, and I turned my script over and on the blank side of the last page I wrote ALIEN. Then I drew an S on the end. Then I drew two vertical lines through the S and held it up to show them. Maybe it was just Pavlovian conditioning when they saw the \$ sign connected closely to the word 'Alien'. Or maybe it was the confidence I projected. But they said yes.

Finally, can you crack the secret to immortality, so we are gifted with a new James Cameron genre classic every decade for the rest of time?

Working on it. But it's so hard to get quality time in the lab when I'm finishing a big movie.

ZOE SALDAÑA

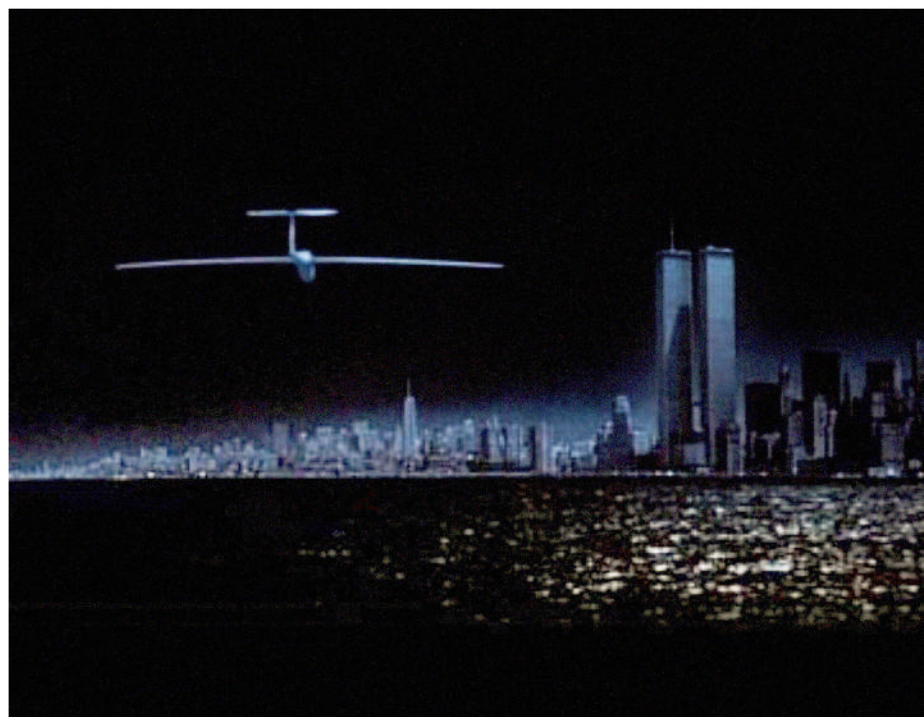


Why water?

Just warning you now, Zoe, you're going to rock the world when they see you as Neytiri when *Avatar: The Way Of Water* drops. As for water... the human body is



Above: He said he'd be back, and he was — Schwarzenegger in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). **Right:** 1981's *Escape From New York*, on which Cameron cut his teeth as special visual effects photographer.



Below, top to bottom: Sigourney Weaver's Ripley faces off with the Alien Queen in *Aliens* (1986); Dr Lindsey (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) and Bud Brigman (Ed Harris) meet an NTI — "Non-Terrestrial Intelligence" — in *The Abyss* (1989).

60 per cent water. What's not to love? The truth is, I was drawn to the ocean as a kid who loved science-fiction and other worlds, who suddenly realised that an astonishing alien world exists right here on Earth and that I could actually go and explore it if I just strapped on a scuba tank. It was that promise of adventure and curiosity that drove me inevitably to the ocean, even though I lived in rural Canada 400 miles from the nearest one. Then in my early years as a diver I fell in love with the ocean, its denizens, and the general lure of boats and being at sea. Which I then brought into my filmmaking with *The Abyss* and *Titanic*, as well as a slew of deep-ocean documentaries. And now our little film.

RIAN JOHNSON



I'd love to hear about your writing process. Are you a structure person? It seems maybe you are. And how much of the process is outlining versus finding it on the page?

Hi, Rian. Big admirer of your work. I answer the writing process question below...

CHAD STAHELSKI



You understand people at a very base level, and you understand audiences. Every character gets enough screen time, every scene

is just right, every arc is just at the right time. How do you not miss? I'm jealous!

Hi, Chad. Our mutual friend Taran Butler taught me how to shoot straight, just like he did Keanu for your films. As for hitting the mark as a screenwriter, it's a learned art. Reading scripts and seeing how others did it will get you partway, but ultimately it boils down to your own aesthetic filter, what interests you, and how you'd tell a story if you were sitting around a campfire with some friends and a beer. That part may be instinct. The instinct to set the scene, introduce the characters in a way that gets the audience interested in their problems, then throwing in unexpected swerves etc. I think the same part of our brain that writes our dreams for us every night can be trained to the discipline of writing dreams for the world. Logic is not necessarily our friend — things don't have to be plausible (cyborgs from the future don't really hunt Bob's Big Boy waitresses), they just need to seem plausible in the dream logic of the cinematic moment. As a process I work from two ends toward the middle — I believe in starting with a great opening and knowing my ending, then figuring out the pesky bit in-between. I also start from opposite poles — character and visual. I start writing forward from character, making notes about my people, what they want, what their problem is and what lengths they'll go to in solving it. Writing from the heart outward, if you will. But also, I work backward from a list I call "Stuff I Just Want To See." Action set-pieces. Big visual-design moments. Then I torture the shit out of the plot until those people get stuck in the middle of the things I want to see. Simple.

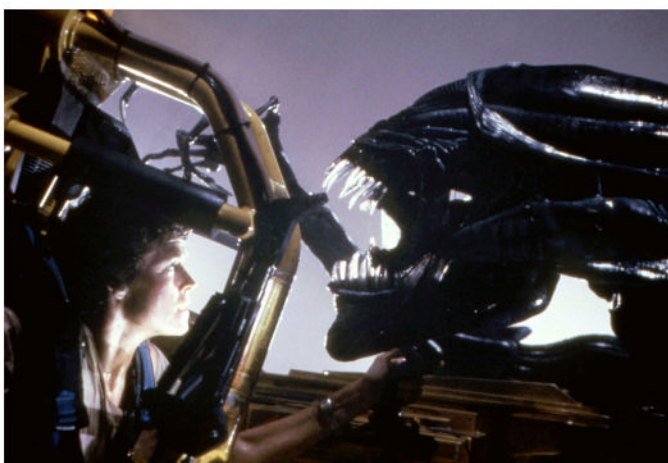
GINA PRINCE-BYTHEWOOD



Some of your biggest films have a love story at their core. One of my favourites is *The Abyss*. While they have all the genre elements

working in tandem (which makes them so good), I'm curious if you consider these films love stories first, and if that is where your curiosity for these stories begins?

Hi, Gina, and congratulations on the success of *The Woman King* — my kind of film. Women kicking ass. I've always said "all of my movies are love stories" but I wouldn't say my creative process necessarily starts there, except for the obvious one: *Titanic*. I pitched it as "*Romeo And Juliet* on a sinking ship", so it was a love story from the jump. With others, like *The Terminator* and *The Abyss*, they started off as genre stories — "a time-travelling hit man targeted on an insignificant person whose





existence has great significance in the future”, or in the case of *The Abyss*, a high-concept one-liner: “*Close Encounters* underwater.” But then as I try to figure out how to create real emotional stakes for the characters, my stories somehow always become love stories. I guess I’ve always believed that to be truly heroic, a character must put someone else before themselves and be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice if necessary. So, the love story is my path to creating powerful and heroic characters. It may be new love (*The Terminator*, *Titanic*, *Avatar*), it may be a marriage being tested (*The Abyss*, *True Lies*), it may be the love of a parent for a child (*Terminator 2*, *Aliens*, and *Avatar: The Way Of Water*). I guess I’m just a romantic at heart.

PATRICK MCKAY

(THE LORD OF THE RINGS:
THE RINGS OF POWER showrunner)



First of all, we’re mega, mega, mega fans. How did it come about that the marketing campaign for *Terminator 2* gave away the twist? The story is such that you think Arnold’s the villain, until Arnold and the T-1000 are face-to-face in a hallway and Arnold says, “Get down!” And then you realise he’s the good guy. That’s a huge twist that was given away in the marketing. Did you lose that battle?

Thanks for the mad props, and right back at you — you crushed it with Season 1.

All of us have had our battles with the Suits, but the case you mention was not a battle. The Carolco guys, Mario Kassar and Andy Vajna, were good partners with me on *T2*, and I led the charge on marketing, including showing Arnold as the good guy. It wasn’t a *Sixth Sense* kind of twist that’s revealed only at the end of the film. He’s revealed as the Protector at the end of Act One. And I always feel you lead with your strongest story element in selling a movie. I believed our potential audience would be more attracted to seeing how the most badass killing machine could become a hero than they would be to just another kill-fest in the same vein as the first film. Sequels have to strike a delicate balance between honouring the most loved elements from the first film, but also promising to really shake things up and turn them upside



Top left: Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) and Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn) in *The Terminator* (1984). **Above:** Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Rose (Kate Winslet) in 1997’s *Titanic*. **Right:** Jamie Lee Curtis with Arnie in *True Lies*.



down. Our marketing campaign for *T2* was exactly that promise, and it worked.

J.D. PAYNE

(THE LORD OF THE RINGS:
THE RINGS OF POWER showrunner)



One of the things we really admire about you is that on the page you’re as brilliant a writer as you are a director. You’ve been such an inspiration to us. Who as a writer is an inspiration to you?

Hi, J.D., and thanks for the kind words. My earliest influences as a fledgling screenwriter were Walter Hill and Michael Mann. I marvelled at the economy of words in Walter’s script for *The Driver*... one-word sentences stacked vertically on the page... almost haiku. And Michael’s script for *Thief* was equally spare and relentlessly paced. I will say now that I shamelessly cribbed from their style while

writing *The Terminator* and *Aliens*. As I built confidence, I later evolved my own style, which I guess is still evolving. I started out as a lone wolf, writing *The Terminator* at a booth at Du-Par’s restaurant on Ventura Blvd at 3am, but I’ve come in the last couple decades to respect collaboration. I really enjoy the process of the writers’ room, which I learned on *Dark Angel* under Chic Eglee’s tutelage and applied on the creation of the four *Avatar* sequel scripts.

S.S. RAJAMOULI

(Director of *RRR*)



You have spent about 25 years in the world of *Avatar*... I am sure you will have many more stories/ideas that you want to tell. Do you ever feel bad, that you are not able to tell them?

Hi, S.S. Two thoughts in answer to your question: the first is that the world of *Avatar* is so

Below, top to bottom: *The Driver* (1978), the writer-director of which, Walter Hill, is a Cameron inspiration; Likewise Michael Mann, writer-director of 1981's *Thief*; *Alita: Battle Angel* (2019), which Cameron produced, working with director Robert Rodriguez; Angela Bassett and Ralph Fiennes in Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995), written by Cameron.



sprawling that I can tell most of the stories I want to tell within it and try many of the stylistic techniques that I hope to explore. And secondly, yes... our time as artists is finite. I will always mourn some of the stories that I don't get to make. But I feel a great satisfaction when other directors want to explore some of my ideas, like Kathryn Bigelow did with *Strange Days*, and Robert Rodriguez did when I passed him the baton on *Alita: Battle Angel*. I look forward to more collaborations in the future with directors I admire.

MORFYDD CLARK



Do you value chemistry reads?

Hi, Morfydd. I'm mesmerised by your Galadriel. Tough as nails. To answer your question: directors make a thousand decisions a day, but the most important decision a director makes is whether to cast an actor or not. So, I take the auditioning process very seriously. I'm told by actors that I spend way more time with them in a first reading than normal auditions. I want to get to know them — how they think, and how they react to ideas I might throw at them on the fly. I say, "Let's go to work," and treat it, for a half-hour or an hour, like they've already got the part, and we're just solving a scene together. So, I guess the answer to your question is "yes", but the most important chemistry is between director and actor. The chemistry between the actors is also critical, especially in a love story, and I've had good luck with chemistry reads in the past. On *Titanic* I cast Kate first, and she generously read with a number of young Jack candidates. I saw how excited she got after reading with Leo. I'd seen him miraculously become Jack before my eyes for a few minutes, like a unicorn stepping into a sunlit clearing — a brief but unforgettable glimpse — but it was good to have that glimpse validated by Kate, who was opposite him in the scenes. It was similar on *Avatar*. Zoe was cast first, and she read with Sam, who was already being strongly considered, before I made the final decision. When I saw them together, the movie suddenly seemed to come to life. After that moment, I knew that all the visual-effects challenges in the world couldn't stop us from telling a powerful love story.

HARRISON FORD



I'm a fan and I love your films and I'm waiting for your call. C'mon, man — where's that call?

PIERCE BROSNAN



Why haven't you ever put me in one of your movies?

Answering both Harrison and Pierce: I'd love to work with both you guys, and many other actors I deeply admire. My great regret as a filmmaker is that I take so long to

make my films that I only ever get to work with a tiny fraction of the artists that I respect. I have a long list of the people I would love to collaborate with, but I know my career will end before I've even made a dent in it.

ROBERT RODRIGUEZ



Mind-bending concept, unstoppable relentless villain, huge stakes and consequences, heart-shattering love story. You

juggle all these elements and seamlessly blend them, doing away with the idea that you must make a small film for it to be personal. What, then, would you say are the thematic elements you tend to gravitate towards most as a filmmaker?

Hey, Robert! Regarding themes and elements — I'm old-fashioned. I like stories about flawed, average people overcoming tremendous obstacles, or just simply surviving, based on their quick thinking and reserves of courage they didn't know they had. I like underdog stories about everyday heroes... Sarah Connor the waitress, Bud Brigman the oil-rig foreman, Jake Sully the jarhead ground-pounder... who are tested and prevail in wild circumstances. I like themes of love, trust, duty and self-sacrifice. And when we did *Alita: Battle Angel* together, you saw how I love the theme of our human relationship with technology, and how we express our human nature through our machines, for better and worse.

MADS MIKKELSEN



I worked with Sam Worthington on a film called *Clash Of The Titans*, and I thoroughly enjoyed that experience. So, my question is: when will you be done with Sam, so we can have him back?

It seems we both share a deep respect for Sam, who is a gifted actor. I thoroughly enjoy working with him and we seem to bring out the best in each other. We approach each day as a quest for truth, and as you must know from working with him, he pursues the truth of his character relentlessly and fearlessly. His superpower is the ability to project strength and vulnerability in equal measure. I can see why you want to work with him again. But to be fair, we're not keeping him from the world... Sam and I finished our performance-capture work together over two years ago. Sam's just very picky about the parts he plays, and is busy building a family, which he values above all else.

COLIN TREVORROW



In *The Abyss*, mankind makes first contact with an alien entity whose bioluminescent biological make-up evokes life on Pandora. Does *The Abyss* share a universe with *Avatar*?

Just the universe of my brain. And obviously



I love bioluminescence. From early childhood on I've had a deep awe and fascination with all the wonders of nature, both above and below water. That's certainly what drove the creation of *Avatar*. *The Abyss* had a different motivation. It was my version of *The Day The Earth Stood Still*, a function of my Cold War angst, and a comment on how an alien super-intelligence might judge rather harshly the way we mistreat each other and our beautiful world. In *Avatar*, WE are the invaders from space, and the common theme with *The Abyss* is that we are judged harshly by a more evolved alien culture, in that case the Na'vi, who live in a harmony with nature in a way that we have forgotten.

MATT AND ROSS DUFFER

(*STRANGER THINGS* creators/showrunners)



Your run of (forgive us) titanically successful films is arguably unparalleled in the history of cinema. Is there some kind of secret formula you've devised here? Or do you just make what you love, and it just happens to resonate with... the entire planet?

Love *Stranger Things*, and thanks for making me feel old by doing a retro series based on the time period of my breakthrough years.

Before I wrote *The Terminator*, I made a list of the top 20 highest-grossing films of that era (the early '80s) and did some armchair analytics about what they all had in common, writing down principles like "ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances" etc on a legal pad. It served as a guide on my first couple projects. Unfortunately, I've lost the list. But, as you know, once you start putting your films out there, you get a lot of feedback from the audience, good and bad, which can then guide the way in which you tell stories going forward. But I think ultimately it just boils down to a filmmaker's personal aesthetic. I try to tell stories that I would want to see in a movie theatre. Pretty simple. I never formally studied film at university. My film school was the drive-in movie theatres of Orange County in the '70s. Just me and my date, or a pal, and a six-pack. And a speaker hung on the car window.



Bonus question: When are you going to finally release 4K Blu-rays for *The Abyss* and *True Lies*??

Comin' at ya soon.

CHRIS COSTELLO

(Creator of the Papyrus font)



For better or worse, Papyrus (the font used for the *Avatar* logo and alien subtitles), is widely used to represent Indigenous themes as well as all things organic, natural and "new agey". Was the decision to use this font in *Avatar* at all inspired by its association today with Native-American culture?

Just think of how much we *could* have grossed if it wasn't for that damn font. I guess you know that your movie has made the grade as a cultural icon when people are still stressing over the title font a decade later. I was not aware that our font was an off-the-shelf thing; I assumed the art department or the title company came up with it. Of course, it was trolled mercilessly as a lazy choice, but frankly I like the font. Ryan Gosling needs to get out more, instead of freaking out over our font. Time to move out of your mom's basement, Ryan! (*Gosling appeared in a Saturday Night Live skit as an Avatar fan who hates Papyrus.*) And if Papyrus resonates with the issues of Indigenous cultures in the public consciousness, then that fits well with *Avatar*, so I'm not losing any sleep over it.

SAM MENDES



Is it true that on *Titanic* and all your other movies you have a limit of 20 takes, and if you don't get it within 20 takes you move on?



That's what I heard.

Hi, Sam. This is the rare amusing rumour that has the added benefit of being true. I like a lot of takes, because... why the fuck not? You've spent all this time and energy bringing all these people and elements together to this moment, down to this one finite focal point, and it's all built and lit and rehearsed, sitting right there in front of your lens... why would you walk away before you know you've done your best and gotten the very best the actors have to give? So, the 20-take rule is self-imposed, to keep me disciplined in a real world of deadlines and budgets. Plus, if you can't get it in 20 takes, there's probably something fundamentally wrong with the set-up, so shoot a quick cutaway and move on. I remember Leo DiCaprio was outraged when I pulled the plug on a "oner" scene at 20 takes. We didn't have it and he couldn't fathom just moving on. He was more of a perfectionist than I was! I recall we used take three.

CARRIE HENN

(Newt from *ALIENS*)



What is your favourite movie that you have not worked on? Also, it's always such a pleasure watching your movies, and seeing the amazing things you have done since *Aliens*! I'm always

Alamy, Allstar, Getty Images, Photofest, RGA



Facing page, clockwise from main: Stephen Lang's Colonel Quaritch tools up in *Avatar*; Truly iconic — the Terminator; Carrie Henn as Newt, with Weaver in *Aliens*; Cameron's favourite film, 1939's *The Wizard Of Oz*. **Below:** A lesson in bow skills from Jake for Neteyam (Jamie Flatters) in *Avatar: The Way Of Water*.

so proud of you! Also, my son wanted me to tell you he is VERY excited about *Avatar*!

Hi, Carrie. I know you turned your back on acting at an early age, probably as a result of me being your first director, but if you ever want to come back, you'll always have a place on my films.

My favourite film is *The Wizard Of Oz*. It's been with me my whole life, from first viewing on a black-and-white TV as a kid in the early '60s, to my periodic family screenings of it to this day. It's still as magical now as it ever was. That moment when Dorothy opens the door and steps out of her black-and-white world into the vivid, Technicolor land of Oz still gets me. The genius of that, and how it must have taken the audience's breath away in 1939. Now I see it also through the jaded lens of decades of production experience and think about how hot that lion suit must have been under those old arc lights, and how tough actors were in those days. But it has never lost its charm, or the power of its message, which is not,

"There's no place like home," but that if you respect the people you meet along your path, and help them, you'll become friends, and your care for each other will get you through any adversity. Even lions and tigers and bears.

HANS ZIMMER



How did you manage to do the first *Terminator*? You and [producer] Gale Anne Hurd, you managed to pull off one of the great movies — it was such an original story, very original music... How did you manage to get people to trust you? How did you have the balls to pull that off?

Hi, Hans. Thanks for the compliment regarding the score. I'm sure Brad Fiedel will be very pleased. Getting people to trust us was not easy, as it was essentially a first feature for both Gale and myself. I learned later that they had another director standing by to step in if I screwed up. On my second day of shooting, I had a fever of 102, but I pushed myself to make the day. I knew if I blinked, I'd be out. So, I guess it was pure will. It helped enormously that Arnold Schwarzenegger really believed in the script, and we clicked from the start. Both of us are very driven people. There was a recognition and respect, and it's fuelled our friendship to this day. It's such a reality of Hollywood that the star calls the shots, but in my case, it helped enormously with the naysayers and handwringers at the two production companies, Orion and Hemdale. Arnold gives me way too much credit for jumpstarting his movie career, but it's certainly true that *The Terminator* exists because of him.

ALEJANDRO GONZÁLEZ IÑÁRRITU



As I understand it, you, in a way, have for the last five years been shooting a triptych. A triptych is a massive enterprise, especially

films that have this number of visual effects. How can you divide or compartmentalise? How are you threading one to the other?

Hi, Alejandro. There are actually four films in total now planned and in progress, including *Avatar: The Way Of Water*. Yes, it's a daunting prospect, but the scale of the undertaking was a big part of the appeal. The opportunity to go deep with the characters and live with them over time... Movies are a highly stylised art-form. We attempt to compress so much about the human experience into a mere two hours or so. And I was tired of leaving so much of our writing and acting creativity on the editing-room floor. This was a chance to live in a world with these people and to see them evolve over years, to pick themselves up from their defeats, learn to live with their grief, and to move on. In my mind it was all one huge story, which I shared with the actors in its totality before we started. They were excited by the challenge to create that level of human nuance and detail, despite it being such a visual genre. All that said, we've approached each film as a separate complete story in three acts, each with a defined denouement. In terms of process during shooting, we might be working on any of films two, three, or four, on any given day, for production reasons. So, a big part of my job as director was to spend an hour or so at the beginning of each day orienting the actors to where they were in their characters' lives, so they could create the moment. It was a higher level of discipline than any of us had encountered before. And as always with hard challenges (which I know you understand): not a burden, but a blessing.

MICHAEL BIEHN



Do you feel there is a personal price you have paid being in the film industry?

We all pay a price, working in entertainment. The show, whatever it is, requires everything of you, all you have to give and more. My struggle in the last 20 years has been to be there for my family and still accomplish my goals as an artist. It takes discipline on a higher level than just that of our craft, and it means I need more downtime, so I will get to make fewer movies. Fewer of my stories will get told. That's the price you pay being a husband and father. But my family, my wife Suzy and my children, mean more to me than any Oscar or box-office win.

JANE CAMPION



Do you want to have coffee with me next week?

Cool. Tuesday works for me.

Roxy Theatre café at 4pm? ☕



AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER IS IN CINEMAS FROM 16 DECEMBER

VIEW

! SPOILER
WARNING

INDISPENSABLE HOME ENTERTAINMENT [EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT]

Best



Western

Almost a year on from her Oscar win for *The Power Of The Dog*, writer-director **JANE CAMPION** revisits her much-lauded drama



Here: Peter (Kodi Smit-McPhee) and Phil (Benedict Cumberbatch) ride out. **Right:** Jane Campion at work, as first assistant director Phil Jones observes.

IT WAS A hell of a comeback. *The Power Of The Dog*, Jane Campion's first film since 2009's *Bright Star*, bagged 12 Oscar nominations, with Campion winning for Best Director. Adapted by her from Thomas Savage's 1967 novel, it is set in 1925 and swirls around rancher Phil Burbank (Benedict Cumberbatch), a closeted gay man who had a secret relationship with his mentor, Bronco Henry, and now, tortured and downright mean, takes out his pain and shame on those around him — particularly his brother's wife Rose (Kirsten Dunst) and her son Peter (Kodi Smit-McPhee). It's a beautiful, beguiling, intense and tender drama which, clearly, leaves a trail of superlatives in its wake.

With a new Campion-approved 4K master hitting Criterion, the director pulls up a chair in her New Zealand seaside home to talk to *Empire* while the trees sway outside. She's taking a break from working on the new film school (funded, like *The Power Of The Dog*, by Netflix) she's set up, for which she has selected ten participants, who will get paid to study there — it's a dream project, she says, yet baulks slightly when we ask if she'll be teaching. "I don't think I'm much of a teacher. I would say I share practice. But when I share practice, I do it *good*," she laughs. There can be no doubting that.

Where are you? Is this home?

Yeah, I'm in this house by the sea, which we're fixing up. It's about 20 minutes from Wellington City.

Looks kind of windy outside.

No, this is mild! Believe me. It's like living in a lighthouse sometimes.

Have you had a few months away from the film now, to get back to normal life?

Yeah. I have had quite a lot of time away from it, which was in some ways a relief, but it was also like falling off a cliff. Because there was just so much attention, and suddenly zero. I'm particularly close to the four [lead] actors and to the producers, and now I just never see them. It's almost like a death for me. I actually feel like I'm a little bit in grief. It's hard for me to think about it.



Top to bottom: An intense exchange between Peter and Phil; The former Yale student and trainee doctor have more in common than surface differences suggest; Kirsten Dunst as inn owner Rose; Cowhands get back to nature; Campion and Cumberbatch enjoy the day's work.

It has been a while, but the film is still reverberating. Not least because its themes are so relevant to what's being discussed in culture and society of late. Phil's toxicity, the gaslighting, his jealousy, fear and shame, and the self-loathing that's at the heart of so much bullying — I imagine that's all there in the book. What struck you about it?

The themes of bullying and alpha-male masculinity were certainly there in the book, and the confusion of the homophobic homosexual. Thomas Savage was a gay man. He did get married, but he still had love affairs with men. A difficult life for that reason, because he was very devoted to his wife as well, as a friend, and they had children together. So it just must have felt not really optional to be out at that time.

Indeed.

I think the book talks about a particular uncle of his that he lived with; it's quite close to what really happened. I'm guessing [Savage] is guessing he was gay. [Savage] would have been the boy in that situation, the Kodi Smit-McPhee character. He fictionalised aspects of it, but he really did live that life. He was actually a great rider as well, he was a capable cowboy. I think that's why I loved it so much — you really felt it was written from somebody's point of view who lived the life.

Before shooting, you did some work to get closer to Phil's life — specifically, exploring your dreams with a dream analyst, writing them down and discussing them, and then exploring Phil in a more subconscious way, seeing things from his perspective. How did it come about?

As director, I had trouble connecting to the Phil character. And I was guessing that Benedict would have that same problem. I was looking for some work that we could do that would open that area up, and someone recommended [acting and dream coach] Kim Gillingham's work. I'd never done it before. So I did it before I handed it on to Benedict, to check it out, to see whether I thought it was bona fide. And it was the most helpful thing I've ever done.

How did it manifest, and how did it make your work more effective?

Nothing has a one-to-one manifestation like that. It sort of steeped the project in different juices and marinated it. With Phil I just felt like, "Oh, yeah, this is this human being." The judgement was all gone. It made me just really interested in him as a person without going, "Oh, he's very bad." Obviously, he's quite bad [laughs]. I mean, bad people



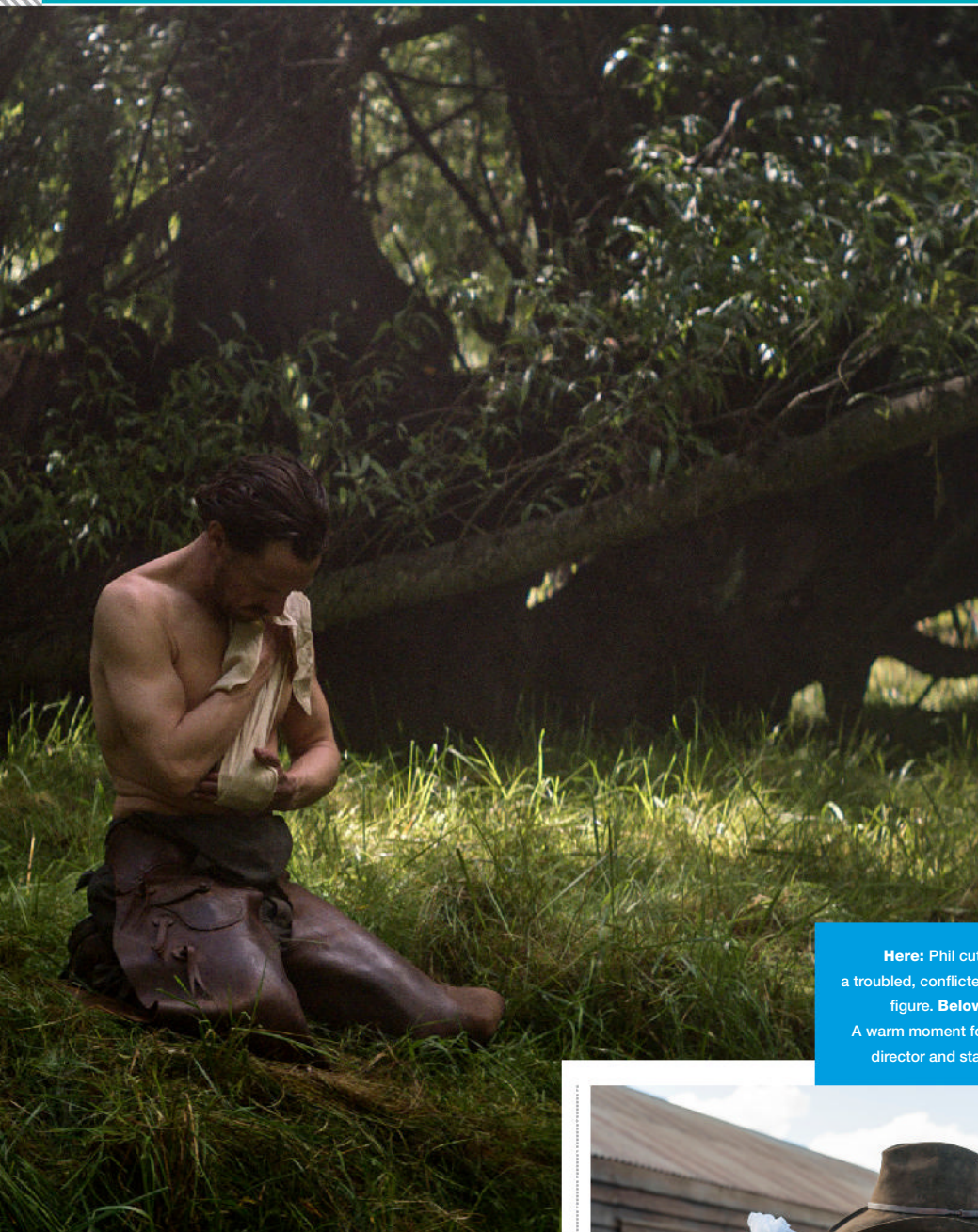
are always fascinating, and way, way more interesting than good people. As characters. And it just released me to feel confident about it. The sense was that I had inhabited him, that I had embodied the experience of Phil.

It sounds like an essential creative tool. Are you still using it?

Well, I'm recommending it to so many people, and not many people are taking it up, funnily enough [laughs]. Look, it's all... I love therapy, I love all that sort of stuff. So it's not new to me. Without therapy I would be a very broken person. Although the dream work that Kim does is not therapy.

There are some really ethereal sequences in the film. The big sex scene is between a man and a piece of fabric. Phil lying in the grass, playing with a bit of material.

But it's not a bit of material. It's the central link he has to Bronco, to where his actual sexuality was probably really vital and amazing. Together, these two super-capable men, you know, must



Here: Phil cuts a troubled, conflicted figure. Below: A warm moment for director and star.

have had some cool times together [laughs]. It's not in the book, so I was looking for ways within the story to bring Bronco Henry to the present, to come up with some visually available cues. So I thought about this idea and they made a silk handkerchief, and in the rehearsal I said, "Ben here's this handkerchief," and he started to touch it, and he went, "Oh, this thing's horrible! It's scratchy." And I went, "Ben. Is there any way you can make it feel nice?" [laughs] Obviously he got over that. Ben is kind of mesmerizing, and that work that he and [cinematographer] Ari [Wegner] did there... it was just an honour to be there.

Did you expect anyone to be rankled by some aspects of the film? Sam Elliott made comments [on Marc Maron's WTF podcast], taking issue with it and you, and the idea of cowboys "running around" with no shirts on. It was ironic that a film exploring the performative aspects of masculinity got such a defensive response like that. It sort of validated what you were doing. I know. I'm sure he's really sorry for that.



He did apologise.

Yeah. And, you know, we all say stupid things sometimes, and I don't want to overdo it. I've said my own stupid things. But I just think that, you know, case proven, really. What can you say? I wouldn't expect Sam Elliott to love it. Although I do love Sam Elliott, I think he's good. And I can understand. I think there's a sense of wanting to defend the image of masculinity. Even Phil wants to do that. Phil doesn't like Peter acting effeminately. And I do feel like some men really treasure masculinity in a way, as if it's... endangered [laughs].

Some people maybe feel like they're being attacked by changes in society and culture.

That is happening. But there's really a lot of variety within masculinity. I talk to a lot of friends and we don't even know if we're men or women half the time, you know? A friend of mine said to me recently, "I don't even think about myself as a man." And I don't think about myself like that most of the time. I'm just a creature, you know?

You've mentioned before that in your own childhood you lived with an abusive nanny who beat you and your sister for a few years, and scared you into not telling your parents. But writing this film, you realised a connection there to Phil and Rose. How much did you emotionally revisit what had happened to you, and did the process of exploring the material in this film help you with that at all?

It's so weird: when I was reading this book and writing the script, I didn't think there was anything in my life that had much to do with it. I would say that, and I can't believe how strongly I was in denial. It took me a while to go, "Actually, I really do know that sense of dread." Living in a house with someone that's got power over you. And you're always aware of where in the house they are because you're really frightened of them. And constantly hyper-alert. And I went, "Oh my God, yeah. I've lived this. I know it." I do feel sorry for the nanny, because she could have been loved by us and remembered so differently if she had not been so distrusting or so strange or whatever. I am actually sorry for every human

that suffers, and behaves in shocking ways that are shameful and that hurts others. I think they're really, in the end, worse off. But yeah, it was a little bit of a treasure when it turned up and I went, "Right, I know this, I can use it." But I don't feel like a wound was dealt with in any particular way.

Overall, though, it seems like making the film was such a great experience for you.

Yeah. The overall experience was extraordinarily positive for me. Because I won an enormous amount of awards in the early part of my career,

including for *The Piano*. And since then, really hardly anything. And with this film, I probably won more awards than I did with all the other films put together. And it just felt like, coming at the end of your career like that, to have a sort of starburst... I knew how to appreciate it, because I know it's not like that all the time. These moments are not automatic. They're rare. So I was really grateful for that experience of having a film that connected well. **ALEX GODFREY**

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THE CULT OF KIM NEWMAN

The critic and novelist selects the month's weirdest home-ent releases

IN THE 1970s, a horror hit (say, *Carrie*) would trigger TV-movie imitations (*The Initiation Of Sarah*). **My Best Friend's Exorcism** is set in the 1980s, but feels like a '70s TV-movie imitation of *Jennifer's Body*: it's daffy, colourful, cast with game up-and-comers, and a lot of fun. *Eighth Grade's* Elsie Fisher becomes even more of an outcast when she tries to convince the school that Amiah Miller — who unwisely a) dropped acid and b) used a ouija board in a derelict house — is possessed. Appropriately named Christian Lemon (Christopher Lowell), a mullet-and-muscles guy who endorses a faith-based exercise regime, volunteers to help with the exorcism, but wimps out so our hero has to invoke the things she really believes in — Boy George, *Labyrinth*, *E.T.* — to fight the demon.

Jeepers Creepers: Reborn, directed by Timo Vuorensola of the *Iron Sky* series, riffs on the three-film *JC* franchise but goes in a different, if hardly new, direction. Horror-festival attendees are chased into a Creeper-themed escape room, which turns out to be a trap run by a cult who worship the monster from the earlier movies. Set in Louisiana but mostly filmed in Hampshire, it surreally pits veterans of *EastEnders* (Sydney Craven) and *Hollyoaks* (Imran Adams) against the winged, fanged, bone-knife-chucking bogeyman.

Geir Gren's **All Must Die** is a Norwegian hen-party slasher movie. Gina (Viktoria Winge) is about to be married, so her friends kidnap her and take her to a cabin in the woods, where (in an



CULT HERO OF THE MONTH SPOOKY KIDS' SHOWS OF THE 1970S

1970s British kids' TV stretched to challenging, disturbing material grown-up channels would now shy away from. Network is releasing three terrific serials from this era. *The Owl Service* (above) from Alan Garner's novel, is a teenage love triangle set against a myth-haunted Welsh landscape, where Gillian Hills unleashes evil owls from a set of dinner plates. *The Intruder* has a one-eyed stranger (Milton Johns) infiltrate a dying, ancient seaside town by claiming to have the same name as the teenage hero. Johns' performance — sinister but also ridiculous — sends mixed messages, as if a Tobe Hooper villain were being played by Norman Wisdom. The chilling and affecting *Come Back Lucy* is one of those stories in which an alienated kid befriends a magical creature... Only here, the friend, a Victorian ghost, has an evil agenda.

idea creepier than any of the axe-hacking) the party will be joined by all her ex-boyfriends (who are also candidates to become ex-people). Clues suggest wrongnesses, and the line between charades and slaughter is soon crossed. In another unsettling notion, the killer wears a cardboard mask of Gina's smiling face as they stalk her. Though the hacking and slashing is nothing special, it has clever twists and the forest location is suitably eerie.

Vincent Grashaw's **What Josiah Saw** offers overheated Southern Gothic as family secrets and unresolved issues are unearthed (some literally) when a fracking company want to buy up the the central Graham family's old place. This brings together the screwed-up adult children of wild-haired, terrifying patriarch Josiah

(Robert Patrick), who has been a bullying sinner most of his life but now transforms into an even more bullying man of God. His sons (Nick Stahl, Scott Haze) and daughter (Kelli Garner) are all stuck with the physical and mental scars he gave him, and the three siblings reconvene at the farm where their mother hanged herself for mysterious reasons, for a showdown that will settle (or destroy) everything.

Travis Stevens' **A Wounded Fawn** is another intimate horror drama. Serial killer Bruce (Josh Ruben) compartmentalises his mind; he thinks of himself as a nice guy who struggles to keep demons in check, while the murdering part of his psyche is externalised as an alarming apparition called The Red Owl (Marshall Taylor Thurman). He lures a new prospective victim (Sarah Lind) to his woodland lair/killing ground and things do not go as planned, with Red Owl assailed by the Erinyes of Greek myth. The writing is grounded, witty and nuanced — this fits into a wider strain of recent toxic-masculinity horrors which includes, of course, *Men* — and the performances are excellent, while Stevens ambitiously and effectively goes for a sumptuous, magical feel, rather than playing for gritty realism.

Closing time

Brian O'Halloran and Jeff Anderson on saying goodbye to the Quick Stop with Kevin Smith's **CLERKS III**

NOT MANY PEOPLE — hardly any, in fact — will get the chance to attend their own funeral. For obvious reasons. For Brian O'Halloran, that wasn't the case. When it came time to hoot the funeral of his character, Dante Hicks, in *Clerks III*, he was there. Not watching from a distance, like a ghost, but right slap-bang in the middle of the action as one of the mourners, observing Jeff Anderson — who plays Randal Graves, his best friend/arch-nemesis since the first *Clerks* — give a heartfelt eulogy, complete with heart-tugging topper: "You weren't even supposed to be here today."

"It was a public cemetery," explains O'Halloran. "Wardrobe put me in a suit, so anyone who had a long lens wouldn't be able to spoil it. We had to do a decoy diversion tactic. If I could do it in real life, that would be something."

Upon first viewing, Smith's decision to suddenly kill off Dante at the end of *Clerks III*, via massive heart attack during a heated rant at Randal, is a true shocker, albeit one that gives the movie an unexpected emotional depth and richness. But when he first heard of Smith's plans, O'Halloran wasn't surprised. "He's been trying to kill me off since the very first movie," he laughs. "I don't know what he has against me."

O'Halloran's referring to the original ending of *Clerks*, way back in 1994, in which Dante was shot dead by a random robber. And even the original script for *Clerks III*, written years ago, would have seen Dante die after the Quick Stop was flooded during a hurricane. But then Smith had his own massive heart attack in 2018, something he wove into the fabric of both *Jay & Silent Bob Reboot* and *Clerks III*. "After he had his heart attack, and us at our age, knowing people like this, you never know what your next day will bring," says O'Halloran. "But to have the segment where Randal comes to the hospital to show him the cut of his movie, to show him that he was always the Luke, he was never the Han, I thought was absolutely genius."

This sequence is *Clerks III*'s real emotional



kicker, reuniting Dante with his dead fiancée Becky (Rosario Dawson) as they head off to the afterlife together. Up until then, the film's plot has seen Randal — suddenly energised with a desire to change his life after suffering a major heart attack at the beginning of the film — decide to shoot a low-budget, black-and-white film set in the Quick Stop that pays homage to the original *Clerks*, bringing back original cast members and recreating familiar beats, like the salsa shark scene or the anti-cigarette goon slamming down a fake lung on the counter. Even a jumper O'Halloran wears at one point was meticulously recreated from the original, because the actual jumper had been ruined by the fake blood used in the shot-but-discarded ending. "To see Brian wearing his sweater, and laying there on the cooler, was pretty trippy," says Anderson. "It would bring you right back to '94."

It's that film-within-a-film that Randal shows Dante on his deathbed. Although, with a neat Smithian sleight of hand that further rams home the point that this is the end of the line for these characters, and for a series that has now spanned four decades, the film we see is filled with memorable moments from the previous *Clerks* movies. Anderson, it turns out, is responsible for that scene's existence. "It wasn't





Clockwise from above: Old muckers Dante (Brian O'Halloran) and Randal (Jeff Anderson); The Quick Stop, re-opened; The gang in *Clerks II*; Dante's casting call; Randal and Dante in the original *Clerks*.



in the original script," he says. Instead, Dante and Randal's final scene ended with the former hissing hatefully at the latter, "I quit as your fucking friend." "I said to Kevin, 'That's a pretty heady thing to leave them off on,'" Anderson continues. "It was Liz [Destro], one of our producers, who suggested the movie-theatre scene. It made it a little easier that that wasn't their final moments together."

Anderson had held out on the idea of a *Clerks III* for a long time, to the point where Smith publicly stated it was never going to happen. But now it is finally over, it's a bittersweet moment for the pair. "I thought *Clerks II* was a nice way to tie it up, and that a third didn't have to happen," admits Anderson. "But I really like the tone of number three, and the way we leave these characters. It feels like a nice way to put a bow on it. But I'm not sure it's finished. I've floated the idea to Kevin that I would be receptive to doing a *Clerks IV* if Randal buries Dante in the Pet Sematary."

He's joking, but the movie does end with Dante's ghost standing beside his blissfully unaware friend at the Quick Stop. A possible pathway to the future? "Listen, who's to say we can't come back?" says O'Halloran. "I mean, in the third one Dante talks to the ghost of Becky. Why can't the fourth one have the ghost of Dante and Randal talks to him?" You could even call it 'Randal And Hicks: Deceased'. **CHRIS HEWITT**

CLERKS III IS OUT ON 5 DECEMBER ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL

MARK KERMODE'S MOVIE PLAYLIST

THE CRITIC AND SCALA RADIO PRESENTER CHOOSES SCORES HE'S BEEN PLAYING ON HIS WEEKLY SHOW



THE REASON I JUMP

BY NAINITA DESAI

Scala favourite Nainita Desai recently added a News and Documentary Emmy award to her already burgeoning trophy shelf. Desai's music for *The Reason I Jump* (currently on Netflix) was one of my top five film scores of 2021, and it continues to be a compellingly inventive listen. If Desai — rightly acclaimed for her work on the powerful documentary *For Sama* — doesn't wind up winning an Oscar, I'll eat Werner Herzog's shoe.

THE WOMAN KING

BY TERENCE BLANCHARD

On the subject of Oscars, Terence Blanchard's score for Gina Prince-Bythewood's spectacular adventure is just one of the elements that industry insiders *Variety* have tipped for an Academy Award nomination, alongside Viola Davis' barnstorming central performance. Blanchard was previously nominated for Spike Lee's *BlackKkKlansman* and *Da 5 Bloods*. Will 2023 be his year to win?

CATHERINE CALLED BIRDY

BY VARIOUS

Lena Dunham's adaptation of Karen Cushman's historical fiction source may have a medieval setting, but it also has a very 21st century sensibility. Now available on Prime, the film boasts a wonderfully

cheeky soundtrack in which Carter Burwell collaborates with vocal group Roomful Of Teeth, while Misty Miller performs anachronistic cover versions of pop tunes like Supergrass' 'Alright'. It shouldn't work, but somehow it does — perfectly!

FLUX GOURMET

BY VARIOUS

Having fallen in love with the Cavern Of Anti-Matter OST for *In Fabric*, I was thrilled to be able to preview a track by Heather Trost and Jeremy Barnes from Peter Strickland's latest bizarre masterpiece, *Flux Gourmet*. As Strickland explains, the track we played is "a variation of a track called 'Blue Fish' from Heather's forthcoming solo album, but it was changed and rechristened to 'Early Gardens' for the film." It's a real earworm, featuring a clavinet keyboard that was a favourite of Stevie Wonder.

SHOLAY

BY R.D. BURMAN

A conversation with actor Nikeshe Patel revealed that his father owned the soundtrack to this '70s classic and played it over and over again. And I can see why! One listen to R.D. Burman's ultra-catchy title music will have you playing the entire album on hard-rotation. Stand-out tracks include 'Yeh Dosti Hum Nahin (Happy Version)', which is an absolute banger!

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RADIO

MARK KERMODE'S FILM MUSIC SHOW, IN ASSOCIATION WITH EMPIRE, IS ON SCALA RADIO ON SATURDAYS FROM 1-3 PM (SCALARADIO.CO.UK)



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THE VIEWING GUIDE

A deep dive into the
must-see moments from
the month's big release

Werewolf By Night

WEREWOLF BY NIGHT, Michael Giacchino's debut as director, after years of being one of the best composers in the business, may only be 53 minutes long, but it packs a lot in. Here, Giacchino tells us all about how he turned Marvel Studios' first Halloween special into more treat than trick...

DE-COMPOSE YOURSELF

Even in a month featuring *She-Hulk: Attorney At Law*'s fourth-wall-shattering season finale (see page 19), *Werewolf By Night* is the wildest creative swing the MCU has taken in some time — a standalone short film, shot in black-and-white, that pays homage to any era of horror you could mention. And it signals its intention from the off, as Giacchino gleefully transforms the Marvel

Studios fanfare (which he wrote) into a frightacular parody of Universal Horror cues, complete with screams and the sound of slicing claws. "It was a fun thing to do, but it was also an important way to start the movie," says Giacchino. "Those screams were not in my original version. Josh Gould, our sound designer, found some amazing screams, and it's like the cherry on top of everything."

TWILIGHT ZONING IN

"I had always thought of this as an episode of *The Twilight Zone*," says Giacchino. "A self-contained story that we can jump into, and then be dropped off at the end." And that is certainly reinforced early on, with a Rod Serling-esque narrator helpfully setting up the film, which tells the tale of a battle royale between a group of monster-hunters, all desperate to get their hands on the MCU's latest MacGuffin, the Bloodstone — a powerful gem which can aid their monster hunt. That narration was a fairly late addition, replacing an extended intro in which we met Gael García Bernal as the eponymous hairy hero, Jack Russell, a little earlier than in the finished

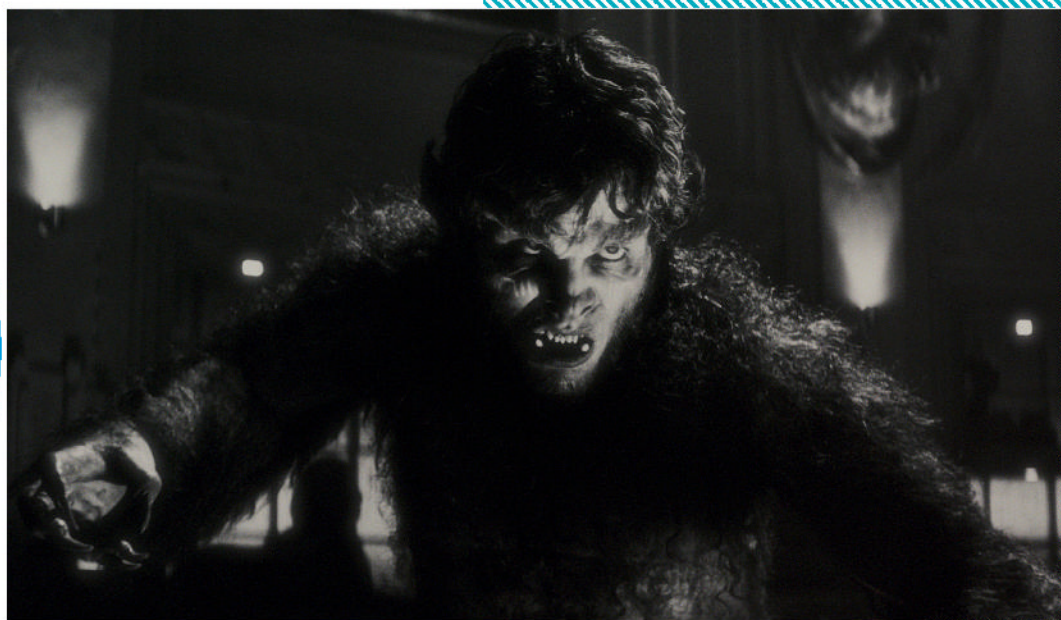
film, and watched him get blood on his hands. "Once we lost those scenes and added that intro, it really helped us strengthen that idea."

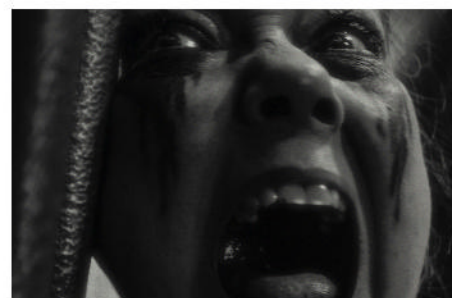
GLUTTON FOR PUN-ISHMENT

Anyone who has followed Giacchino's career will know that he not only knows his way around a memorable melody, but he's addicted to puns, using many in his track listings. So, when the preserved corpse of Ulysses Bloodstone makes a (pre-recorded) speech laying out the rules of the Battle For The Bloodstone, and finishes with a knowing, "I'll be rotting for you," it feels like it's got Giacchino written all over it. Not so. "Credit for that one goes to [screenwriter] Peter Cameron," says Giacchino, although he did put his stamp on the moment during shooting. "I delivered it on set, reading it for everybody. And then we went and found someone else [actor Richard Dixon] to do it in a much better way."

TED TALK

Fairly quickly, the true nature of Jack's visit to Bloodstone Manor is revealed: he's there to





rescue his old chum, Ted, from being used as bait/target practice for the other monster-hunters. Which makes more sense when you realise that Ted is actually obscure-but-awesome Marvel character Man-Thing, a barely sentient giant living vegetable that can detect people's emotions and immolate anyone who shows fear in his presence. Which is almost everyone. But despite all that, Ted is one of the most loveable additions to the MCU in years. "When I was working with the animators on Man-Thing, in the beginning, they tended to over-animate him," says Giacchino, "and I said, 'Think of him as Jeff Bridges. He's just a really nice, sweet guy and he's not going to move real fast. He's just hanging out, enjoying life.'" Apart from all the burning people to death, that is. Jeff Bridges probably doesn't do that.

SHADOWLAND

Giacchino takes his sweet time showing us the film's true title character, but finally — 37 minutes in — Jack turns into the Werewolf By Night while trapped in a cell with Laura

Donnelly's Elsa Bloodstone. But, with Giacchino (correctly) deciding that Rick Baker's werewolf transformation in *An American Werewolf In London* couldn't be topped, he decided instead to have Jack transform off-screen, with the horror of it all conveyed to the audience by training the camera on Elsa's terrified reaction, and showing Jack's bone-crunching and flesh-rending turn via shadows playing on the wall. "What you don't see is always scarier than what you do see," explains Giacchino, who actually deployed a giant projector on set to cast the shadows for real. "I wanted this to feel as real as possible. The only VFX used in that shot were the bars."

EAT U MAMÁ TAMBIÉN

Eventually, we also get to see Bernal in full-on furry mode, and it's a far cry from the truly bestial appearance of the character in the comics. Instead, Giacchino plumped for a largely practical take that saw Bernal don prosthetics to play a smaller, more agile, but no less savage wolf man. In doing so he had to tread a fine line between something that would chill the blood or look like

Jim Dale in *Carry On Screaming*, but it was all in service of the central theme of the film. "The big point of this story is that monsters are people," says Giacchino. "They're not something to be afraid of and kill, just because they're different."

THE BEAST MUST KILL

Another standout visual moment comes when the bloodthirsty Werewolf By Night makes short work of a bunch of Bloodstone goons, ripping and tearing through them in a single unbroken shot which might be the most violent moment in the entirety of the MCU so far. "In terms of the violence and the blood, I just kept pushing as much as I could," laughs Giacchino. "But I think the black-and-white gave us a little licence to push a little harder." Including a very prominent blood-splash which hits the lens during this sequence. "It was a way of being bloody without having blood all over the characters. It's really the only blood in that shot." Yes, but it's also *all* the blood. **CHRIS HEWITT**

WEREWOLF BY NIGHT IS OUT NOW ON DISNEY+

THE RANKING

Four *Empire* writers.
Ten films.
Ordered
definitively.

Samuel L. Jackson movies

Chris: When you absolutely, positively have to rank every motherfucking film on a CV, accept no substitutes. I'm very excited about this. When did you first become aware of the work of Samuel Leroy Jackson?

Amon: It was a while before I understood how cool he is. I think it must have been *Coming To America*, when he's trying to hold up the McDowells.

Kobi: That's exactly the same as me. In the TV version, which I saw growing up in the '80s, Sam Jackson responds, "Forget you." When I saw the unedited version for the first time, I fell on the floor.

Chris: He's got a great gift, and incredible propensity for, swearing. Samuel L. Jackson is Fuckelstiltskin. He can take a "fuck" and spin it into pure motherfucking gold.

Helen: The first thing I saw him in was probably *Coming To America* or *Jurassic Park*, but I wasn't aware of him as 'Samuel L. Jackson' until probably *Pulp Fiction*. I'm not the biggest Tarantino fan, but in terms of Sam Jackson performances, he does incredible work with Tarantino.

Chris: There's this weird alchemy that happens when he works with Tarantino. He was nominated for an Oscar in *Pulp Fiction*, but he's every bit as magnetic and every bit as charismatic in *Jackie Brown*. *The Hatefule Eight* is a film I love. *Django Unchained* is one of Tarantino's most flawed movies, and there's all sorts of stuff going on with the racial politics of Sam Jackson's character, Stephen, which is weird and unsettling, but it's an

incredible performance. That stare... oh my God.

Kobi: In *Kong: Skull Island*, he stares down King Kong.

Chris: He's had a lot of supporting roles in his career, and a lot of cameos where he shows up at the end of the movie, like *Out Of Sight*. But people are going to ask questions if *Do The Right Thing* is not on this list. Or, why is *GoodFellas* not on a list of the top ten Sam Jackson films? Why is *Jurassic Park* not on there? These are all all-time greats. But for me, I'm not counting most of those because they're pre-Sam Jackson, before he became Sam Jackson. They're not Sam Jackson Movies.

Helen: It has to be a balance between the movie and how much of a performance there is.

OUR CRITICS



CHRIS HEWITT

Will never understand the solution to the jugs in *Die Hard With A Vengeance*.



KOBI OMENAKA

He's trying. He's trying real hard to be the shepherd.



HELEN O'HARA

Thinks, "Yes, they deserve to die," could be in every Sam Jackson movie.



AMON WARMANN

You want his blood? Take it! Take his blood!



Illustration: Jacoey

Kobi: I've got *Do The Right Thing* on my list.

Helen: He's so memorable in that role. He communicates all the stuff we have loved about him ever since — the charisma, the intensity, that incredibly distinctive voice.

Chris: He's got over 200 credits on the IMDb. And there are a handful of absolute nailed-on all-time great movies. And *The Negotiator*.

Amon: I love films where there's clearly one person who's the smartest guy in the room, and he knows it. Samuel L. Jackson is that dude in this film.

Chris: That segues neatly to *Unbreakable*, in which Mr Glass is the smartest guy in the room.

Helen: It was an underperformer on release

and its reputation has rightly grown. He's incredible in it. The stillness of the performance, the way it flips, going from the Charles Xavier figure to Brainiac.

Amon: You need an actor who can be persuasive when saying things that sound so completely insane. "They called me Mr Glass" is a top-ten Samuel L. Jackson line reading.

Kobi: One of my choices is based solely on one of his line readings. It's *Snakes On A Plane*. "Enough is enough. I have had it with these motherfucking snakes on this motherfucking plane!"

Chris: I love how we've segued from talking about *Unbreakable*, one of his best films, to *Snakes On A Plane*, one of his least best films.

Helen: I'm with Chris on this one. We had high hopes and then we came out kind of crushed. It wasn't terrible; it just wasn't as gonzo or silly as we'd hoped.

Chris: Shall we talk a little more about *Pulp Fiction*?

Kobi: When he came on the scene, I was like, "Who the hell is that guy alongside John Travolta?" But every single line he says is poetically beautiful. How many iconic lines are in this one film?

Helen: He's stealing the film from a very good Bruce Willis performance and a very good John Travolta performance. He's so frickin' magnetic in that movie.

Amon: *Pulp Fiction* is the epitome of Sam Jackson Cool. He's iconic, and unfazed by anything. He's got a gun to his head and he's the one in control.

Chris: For me, it's the diner scene with Tim Roth, the way he reprises the Ezekiel speech again, but puts a different spin on it. But I also love him in *The Hateful Eight*.

Helen: I feel like it's the best pure performance in a Tarantino film. Some of the others are cooler, some of the others are more iconic, but there are layers to that performance.

Chris: Iconic is also a word we can use for *Jackie Brown*.

There's something so reptilian and evil about him in that movie. He's played a lot of bad guys over the years, and he's an incredibly likeable actor and a very dependable presence, but he has that darkness within him.

Helen: That's key to so much of his appeal, that ability to tap into something dark. He has that burning intelligence that shines through each and every one of his characters. There's a sense with almost all of his characters that nothing's gonna get past them.

Chris: Helen was talking about Sam Jackson outshining Bruce Willis in *Pulp Fiction*. The very next year he was smoking cigarettes and watching *Captain Kangaroo* with Willis again in *Die Hard With A Vengeance*. I love that movie.

Helen: It's not just another buddy-cop comedy. As these films get bigger, there's always the danger of them losing track with reality. I feel like Zeus brings some of that reality back in. He grounds the film in a way it really needs.

Chris: Let's talk Nick Fury, and the MCU. For me, I was only considering movies where he plays a significant part. Not *Avengers: Endgame*, where he turns up at the end for one shot and still gets an "And Samuel L. Jackson As Nick Fury" credit.

Kobi: He's amazing. When he turned up in *Iron Man* at the end, you knew this guy was going to control the Avengers, and it absolutely made sense. When he's not in a film, there's a Nick Fury hole. *The Winter Soldier* is the one I chose.

Chris: I went for *The Winter Soldier* for a number of reasons. He's central to one of the best action scenes in the MCU, he's got that great speech in the elevator — "Keep on steppin'" — and he has a great face-off with Robert Redford. *Captain Marvel*, the performance is warm and fun, but the movie just isn't of the same quality.

Helen: I love *The Winter Soldier*, but it doesn't feel like a Samuel L. Jackson film in the way that *Captain Marvel* does.

Chris: Right, enough squabbling. Let's vote!

THE TOP TEN



PULP FICTION (1994)

Helen: "Authoritative, unpredictable and magnetic, this is a masterclass in scene-stealing and star-making. It launched a million bad impressions, but the original is unmatched."



UNBREAKABLE (2000)

Amon: "Jackson's sophisticated performance packs in everything from frustration to elation."



CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER (2014)

Chris: "A performance worth keeping both eyes open for."



DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE (1995)

Chris: "Of the Jackson/Willis team-ups, this has the least artistic merit, but it's the most fun."



JACKIE BROWN (1997)

Kobi: "Nowhere near as showy as Jules Winnfield in *Pulp Fiction*, but he's skeezy, intelligent, and terrifying."



THE HATEFUL EIGHT (2016)

Chris: "Tarantino's take on *The Thing* is remarkable for its characters' lack of humanity. But Jackson brings the soul."



DJANGO UNCHAINED (2012)

Helen: "Jackson's Stephen is out for his own survival only, and damn everyone else."



COACH CARTER (2005)

Amon: "Jackson radiates natural authority as a wise, tough-as-nails basketball coach with a kind heart."



DO THE RIGHT THING (1989)

Kobi: "He's not a central character, but Mister Señor Love Daddy's DJ-booth narration is the core of the film."



THE AVENGERS (2012)

Helen: "No Fury, no Avengers, and we're all Chitauri fodder. Only Jackson has the stature to order them about."

AGREE? DISAGREE? WRITE IN AND TELL US AT: LETTERS@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM / @EMPIREMAGAZINE

THE STORY OF THE SHOT

How iconic
images came
to life

Jurassic Park

SAM NEILL HAS vivid memories about this month's shot, the moment in Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* where a T-Rex stomps into the mud before a cowering Alan Grant (Neill) and Lex (Ariana Richards). "I'm probably in a little bit of pain in that photo," he recalls. "We'd previously shot Alan Grant waving a flare to distract the T-Rex and a lump of burning stuff landed on my arm and went under my watch. There's still a big scar where this stuff landed."

The first big scare of the movie — "There's been a wobbly glass, some absence of goat, so anticipation is rising," says Neill — it's a moment burnished by the brilliance of live-action-dinosaur creator Stan Winston. Bitten by the malfunctioning mechanical shark on location making *Jaws*, Spielberg insisted *Jurassic Park*'s animatronic creatures be shot in the sanctity of a studio (save a sick Triceratops). The production had taken up all the stages at Universal Studios, so the T-Rex paddock was created at Warner Bros. Studios on Stage 16, one of the biggest in Hollywood. For the giant stomp, the 'Rex was played by a bottom half consisting of a walking rig with two 15-foot-tall legs, weighing 2,000 lb — only there was a fatal flaw.

"It could walk, but nobody realised how muddy it would be and how that would affect the walking rig," says John Rosengrant, then a puppeteer at Stan Winston Studios. "There was talk of doing something with spikes on the feet to help it dig in, but that

posed another problem because you could see the spikes under the feet. So that shot of the stomp is its glorious moment."

It wasn't just the T-Rex who became mired in mud. "I remember the make-up team slathering oatmeal on my arms and face as fake mud," remembers Richards, then aged 12. "I got it all over my script." With a T-Rex's vision attracted to movement, Neill recalls that "Ariana's screaming was very physical. Grant has to keep her still as much as anything." The actor's ability to find the fear surprised even her director. "Between takes, Steven came over to me once and said, 'Ariana, you reach such a deep level of terror — what do you draw from? Were you scared by a clown when you were three? Don't tell me, I don't want to know!'"

The moment became instantly iconic, *Naked Gun 33⅓: The Final Insult* doing its own version, 'Geriatric Park', the following year with a giant walking frame. "I think a lot of things came together with that shot," says Rosengrant. "It's the displacement of the mud. A big, heavy, hydraulic thing simulated what a real, organic creature would do. When you see it push down into that mud and slide just a little bit, there's something really real about that." For Neill, the success of the shot lies in its succinctness. "The shot works because it tells the whole story. Big creatures. Tiny people. Scary stuff. Kids in danger." Welcome to *Jurassic Park*. **IAN FREER**

JURASSIC PARK IS OUT NOW ON DVD,
BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL

INSTANT TRIVIA



1

Moving the full-sized dino from Stan Winston's studio to Warner Bros. was a mission. A route was planned to avoid power lines and the creature was ferried in the black of night. "They didn't want this giant dinosaur — even covered with a tarp — on the freeway at rush hour," remembers Rosengrant.

2

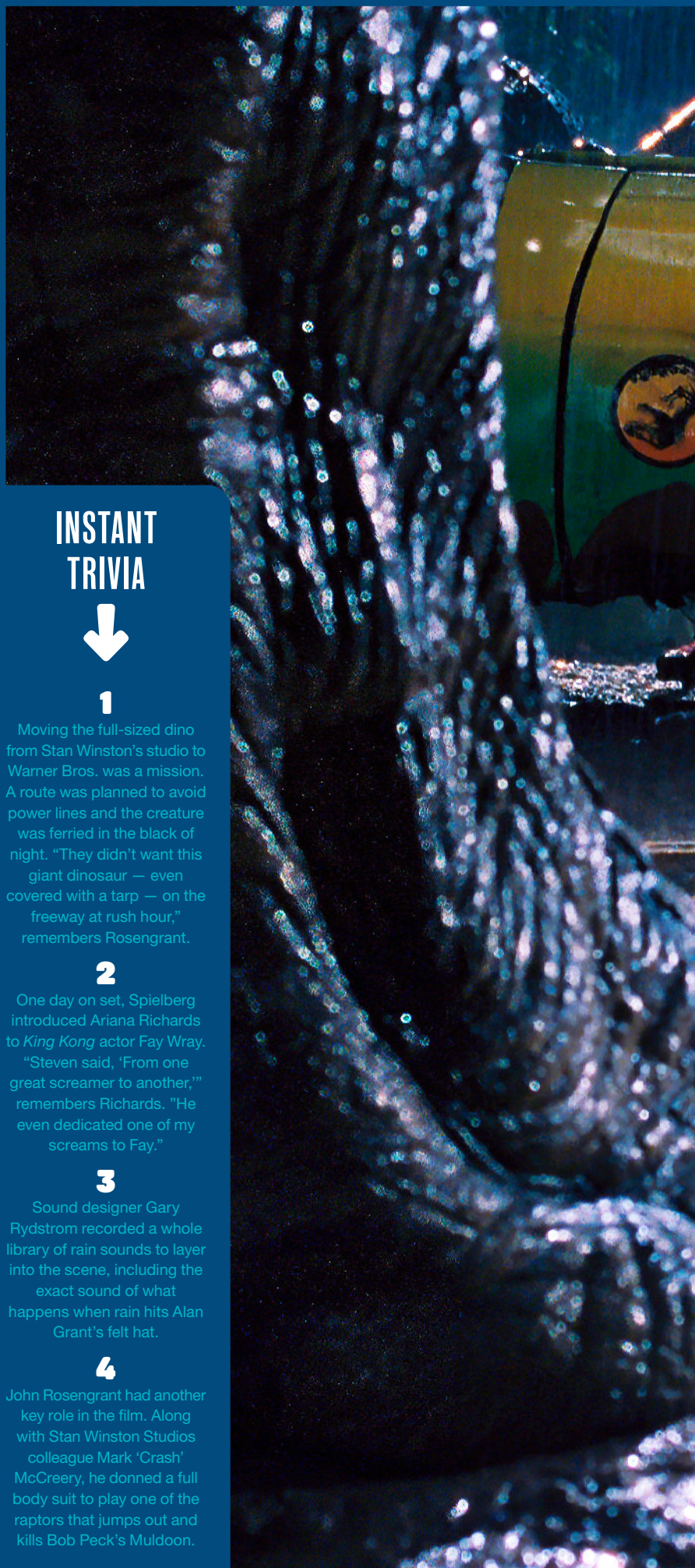
One day on set, Spielberg introduced Ariana Richards to *King Kong* actor Fay Wray. "Steven said, 'From one great screamer to another,'" remembers Richards. "He even dedicated one of my screams to Fay."

3

Sound designer Gary Rydstrom recorded a whole library of rain sounds to layer into the scene, including the exact sound of what happens when rain hits Alan Grant's felt hat.

4

John Rosengrant had another key role in the film. Along with Stan Winston Studios colleague Mark 'Crash' McCreery, he donned a full body suit to play one of the raptors that jumps out and kills Bob Peck's Muldoon.





"It's more
scared of you..."
Alan Grant (Sam
Neill) and Lex
(Ariana Richards)
mid T-Rex trauma.

6 OF THE BEST

PICK OF THE MONTH

Team *Empire* on the month's essential movies and TV**BETTER CALL SAUL: SEASON 6**

OUT 12 DECEMBER / CERT 15 / 690 MINS

TV-14

The debate about which show is better — *Breaking Bad* or its spin-off prequel, *Better Call Saul* — will rage forever (this writer is on the side of the latter, just about). But the very existence of that debate is testament to the beautiful job Peter Gould and Vince Gilligan did in fleshing out Bob Odenkirk's sharp-talking, shit-heel lawyer, and the characters (all hail Rhea Seehorn's Kim Wexler) around him. The closing season takes the kind of creative risks (killing major players, narrative twists and a time-jump as audacious in execution as *2001: A Space Odyssey*'s) that finales usually avoid in favour of fan-service box-ticking, and is all the better for it, giving us a rich and rewarding conclusion. That it remains Emmy-less is a crime. **CHRIS HEWITT**

**FALL**

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 107 MINS

TV-14

Don't ask why BFFs Becky (*Shazam!*'s Grace Caroline Currey) and Shiloh (*Halloween 2018*'s Virginia Gardner) decide to climb a 2,000-foot-tall television mast a year after the death of Becky's boyfriend in a free climbing accident, only to have the ladder they climbed up fall away, leaving them trapped at the top on a platform about the size of a coffee table. With water running out, buzzards circling and secrets surfacing, it'll take all their ingenuity to find a way down — or die trying. *Fall* is one of those films in which a single moment of inauthentic acting or action will bring the whole thing crashing down, but somehow the two actors, and director Scott Mann, keep it aloft, to nail-troubling effect. **DAVID HUGHES**

**THE CAT AND THE CANARY/
THE GHOST BREAKERS**

OUT 5 DECEMBER / CERT PG / 160 MINS

TV-14

Just as every serious actor has to play Hamlet, every comedian ought to make a film where they're trapped in a haunted house with grasping heirs, sliding panels, missing treasure and a masked fiend who might just be the most helpful and pleasant suspect. Bob Hope made two classics of the form, with Paulette Goddard as an imperilled leading lady and a *Ghostbusters*-like balance of funny fast-talk and true spookiness. In *The Cat And The Canary*, the heroine has to stay sane until dawn in a Louisiana mansion; in *The Ghost Breakers*, she's trapped in a castle on a zombie-haunted Caribbean isle. Shivery, chucklesome comfort-viewing. **KIM NEWMAN**

**SILENT RUNNING**

OUT 12 DECEMBER / CERT U / 90 MINS

TV-14

It was a flop on release and has the kind of unsexy premise — sci-fi *Gardeners' World*, essentially — that has kept it severely underrated. Yet *Silent Running* deserves to be spoken of in the same breath as cinema's science-fiction greats. The directorial debut of Douglas Trumbull, it leans heavily on the expertise and innovation he applied to *2001: A Space Odyssey* and would later use on *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* and *Blade Runner*; ahead-of-their-time effects sell the timely tale of a botanist forced to save a greenhouse spaceship from corporate corruption. Bruce Dern puts in a typically righteous, irascible performance, but it's the adorable green-fingered robots, Huey, Dewey and Louie, who steal the show. **JOHN NUGENT**

**BULLET TRAIN**

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 121 MINS

TV-14

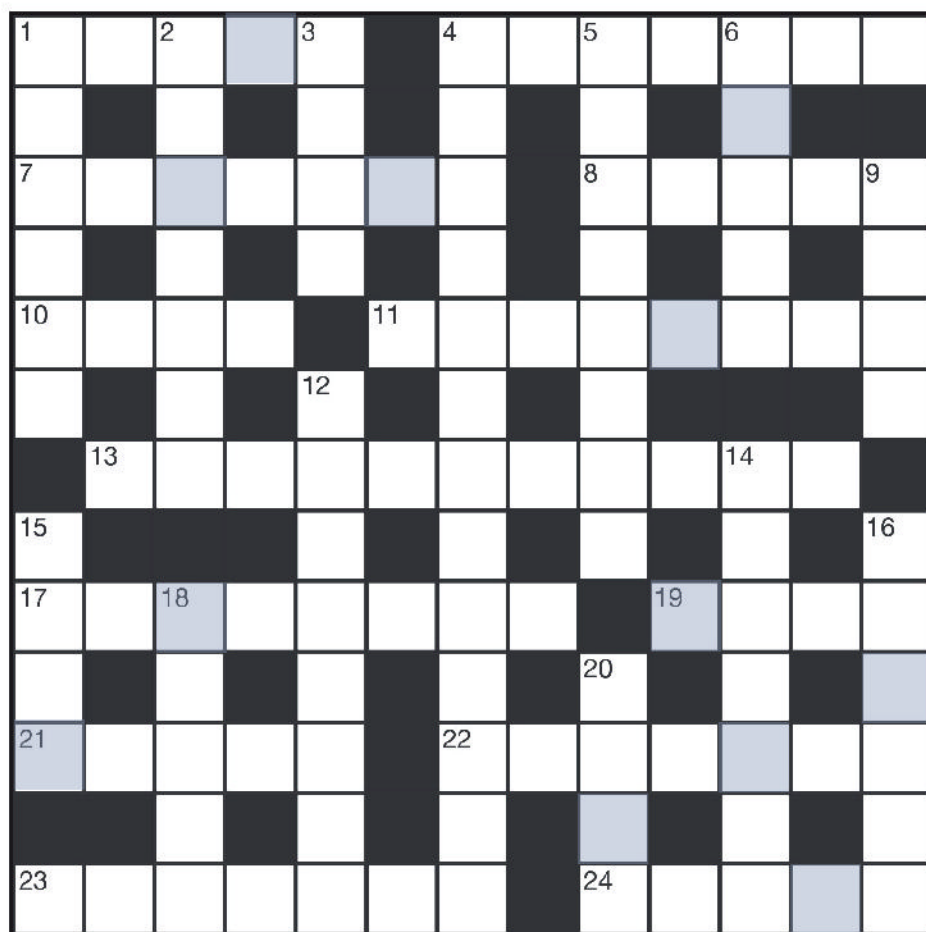
All aboard! Director David Leitch unites a stacked cast — including Brad Pitt, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Brian Tyree Henry, Joey King and Zazie Beetz — for this frenetic, neon-soaked, action-packed ride set almost entirely on a Japanese Shinkansen train. Pitt is Ladybug, a man tasked with nabbing a briefcase from the titular train filled with fellow assassins, most of whom have interweaving motivations for stealing that case. Despite some messy, drawn-out plotting, confusing jumps between characters, and one very dodgy accent, the innovatively staged fight choreography, stylistic flourishes and standout performances from Pitt and Taylor-Johnson mean there's plenty of fun to be had. **SOPHIE BUTCHER**

**THE BEAR**

OUT NOW (DISNEY+) / CERT 15 / 243 MINS

Kitchen nightmares have never looked so appealing. If you enjoyed the Stephen Graham one-shot panic-attack that was *Boiling Point*, take a trip across the ocean to Chicago for another portrait of the life of a chef — full of stress, sweat, sugar and salty behaviour. Jeremy Allen White is our cook as Carmy, a former Michelin-starred chef tasked with resuscitating his family restaurant after the death of his brother Mikey (Jon Bernthal), while somehow turning his new colleagues into something like friends (Ayo Edebiri is a standout as sous-chef Sydney). *The Bear* celebrates the power of food without romanticising it in the ways of Hollywood's past — bitterness, sharpness and acid are all on the menu tonight. **ELLA KEMP**

CROSSWORD AND COMPETITION



ACROSS

- 1 Doug, American who made *American Made* (5)
- 4 Sound films as they were known in their earliest days (7)
- 7 It's home to the answer of **10 Across** (7)
- 8 — *Horizon* (Laurence Fishburne film) (5)
- 10 Neytiri's species in the *Avatar* movies (4)
- 11 It links Maverick, Radha and a family fighting machines (7)
- 13 Aka Norman Osborn (5,6)
- 17 It's what the Avengers do when they get together (8)
- 19 *28 Days Later's* zombie virus (4)
- 21 Track-mounted platform on which a camera may be mounted (5)
- 22 Jack, *Black Narcissus's* cinematographer (7)
- 23 Amanda Seyfried read some written to Juliet (7)
- 24 Jean de Florette's daughter and Emmanuelle Béart's character in the sequel (5)

DOWN

- 1 Ida, who starred in *They Drive By Night* (6)
- 2 Surname of Greer Garson's titular Mrs (7)
- 3 *The — Demon* (Elle Fanning movie) (4)
- 4 In which Randolph and Mortimer Duke made a bet (7,6)
- 5 Character actor who appeared in *12 Angry Men* and *The Exorcist* (3,1,4)
- 6 She gets involved with me and myself (5)
- 9 How The Rock walks, or Jeff Goldblum's kind of guy (4)
- 12 Eddie, star of *The Theory Of Everything* (8)
- 14 Language spoken in *8½* and *Two Women* (7)
- 15 Could be Bond actress Adams, could be Morfydd Clark's Saint (4)
- 16 David, producer and DreamWorks co-founder (6)
- 18 "Kevin has 23 distinct personalities..." began the tagline (5)
- 20 — *Night* (Jamie Lee Curtis film) (4)

COMPETITION ENDS 19 DECEMBER

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, director or character. Visit www.empireonline.com/crossword and fill out the form, along with your answer, in the provided field. Entry is free and closes at midnight on 19 December. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

DECEMBER ANSWERS ACROSS: 1 John Malkovich, 8 Hours, 9 Ray, 10 Spy, 11 Code, 12 Rashida, 14 Safety, 16 Andrew, 19 Arrakis, 20 Abel, 24 Eve, 25 GDT, 26 Anime, 27 Letitia Wright. **DOWN:** 2 Hound, 3 Mask, 4 Lerman, 5 Olyphant, 6 Insider, 7 Hays, 8 Hicks, 13 Straight, 15 Forrest, 17 Wilde, 18 Liotta, 21 Being, 22 Hell, 23 Fair. **ANAGRAM:** MAVERICK

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Entries are free. Entries must be received before 20 December or will not be valid. The Competition is only open to people aged 18 and over who live in the United Kingdom and are not a Bauer employee or their immediate family. One winner will be selected at random from all valid entries. Competition promoted by H Bauer Publishing t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final, and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, via email, between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will email the winner a maximum of three times. If the winner does not respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner at random and the original winner will not win a prize. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full T&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>

WIN!

COBRA KAI 2: DOJOS RISING AND A PS5 CONSOLE



Video-game *Cobra Kai 2: Dojos Rising* continues the intense rivalry at the heart of cult TV favourite *Cobra Kai*. Choose your dojo — Eagle Fang, Cobra Kai or Miyagi-Do — and build up a team of hard-hitting fighters from the series to battle anyone who stands in your way. Then master powerful fighting styles across a variety of game modes to secure your legacy as the All Valley Karate Grand Champion. You've binged the show... now master the game!

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All The President's Men

Chosen by **JOSEPH KOSINSKI**

JOSEPH KOSINSKI: “*All The President’s Men*, when Robert Redford is on the phone and he’s talking to Dustin Hoffman, and they’re starting to slowly crack the case wide open. I read how they ran the phone conversation in real time, with the other actor on the other side of the phone, so it was all practical. There’s an immediacy to it that doesn’t feel staged. It’s just electric.”

INT. WASHINGTON POST NEWSROOM — DAY

Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) and Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) are talking about their investigation into the Watergate break-in. Woodward is at his desk, on the phone, trying to get through to President Nixon’s spokesman, Ken Clawson, to verify an important piece of information. Suddenly, a voice appears on the line.

CLAWSON: Ken Clawson.

WOODWARD: Mr Clawson? This is Bob Woodward. Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* had a conversation with a White House librarian on some books a Mr Howard Hunt took out on Senator Edward Kennedy. She first said that Howard Hunt had taken out books on Senator Kennedy

and then she denied even knowing who he was. I was wondering if you’d like to comment on this confusion.

CLAWSON: Hmm. Listen, let me, er, let me call you back on this matter. I’m gonna check on it for you.

WOODWARD: Alright, thank you. Bye.

He hangs up.

BERNSTEIN: He calling back?

WOODWARD: Yes. This was all one conversation?

BERNSTEIN: Yeah. She says, first of all, “I think I got a bunch of books on Hunt,” but, like, five seconds later she says, “I don’t even know a Mr Hunt,” and it’s obvious that someone got to her.

WOODWARD: But there’s not enough proof. I mean, if there was just a piece of paper that said that Hunt was taking out books on Kennedy and Chappaquiddick. Like, I don’t know, a library slip.

BERNSTEIN: Hunt also took out books from the Library Of

Congress, but what’s more important is that someone got to her in that space of time—

WOODWARD: How do you know somebody got to her?

BERNSTEIN: Because she said that Hunt gave... that there was a lot of books that Hunt checked out. And then she comes back and she don’t even know—

The phone rings. Exasperated by the sudden interruption, Bernstein raises his hand. Woodward picks up the receiver.

WOODWARD: Woodward.

CLAWSON: Mr Woodward, Ken Clawson calling back. I’ve just talked with the librarian.

WOODWARD: Yes, sir.

CLAWSON: And she denied that the conversation with Mr Bernstein ever took place.

Off Woodward’s meaningful glance, Bernstein walks over to another phone.

CLAWSON: She refers to—

WOODWARD: I’m sorry. Excuse me, sir. You say she denies even knowing about the conversation taking place?

Woodward puts his hand over the phone and mouths “seven” to Bernstein, who lifts up his receiver gingerly and dials in to listen, with his hand clamped over the mouthpiece.

CLAWSON: That’s right. She said someone did call her asking about Mr Hunt, but all she did was refer him to the Press Office, and she denies that any other conversation took place.

Bernstein pulls the phone away from his ear and shakes his head, smiling ruefully.

BERNSTEIN: Total bullshit.

CLAWSON: I hope that’s been some help to you.

WOODWARD: Thank you.

Clawson murmurs, and hangs up. Woodward looks intently at Bernstein.

WOODWARD: Gotta get something on paper.

HAPPY CHRISTMAS

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